

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Introduction:

The Author:

The Apostle Paul mentions Luke by name three times in his epistles. Writing to the Colossians, he says: ‘Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.’¹ In two letters written from a prison in Rome, Luke is mentioned. We read in Second Timothy: ‘Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me.’² And again, writing from Rome, Paul sends word to Philemon: ‘Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.’³

Luke makes himself rather inconspicuous. He is universally regarded as the author of *The Book of Acts*, in which he participates as Paul’s traveling companion. At the crucial point where Paul enters Europe to preach the Gospel, Luke joins the party, changing the article from third person plural to first person plural, from ‘they’ to ‘we.’ We read: ‘Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When *they* came to the border of Mysia, *they* tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow *them* to. So *they* passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ After Paul had seen the vision, *we* got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.’⁴

The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary states: ‘By common consent, Luke is regarded as the writer of the third gospel and of Acts. The third gospel is derived from different sources, but all legitimate authorities, as it is confessedly due to those apostles who ‘from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word’ ... Nevertheless, it is the most complete gospel of them all, and the only one that observes a strictly historical method, the first three gospels being biographical sketches or, as designated by Justin Martyr ‘Memoirs of the Apostles.’ It is to be remarked that both Luke’s gospel and Acts are dedicated to one Theophilus (friend of God), which was a custom in those days, obligating those thus receiving a copy as a gift to exert themselves to give the work circulation.’

The same *Dictionary* adds: ‘The materials found in Scripture referring to the life of Luke are scanty and seem to yield the following results: (1) Luke was of Gentile origin. This is inferred from the fact that he is not reckoned among those ‘who are from the circumcision’ (Col 4:11; cf. v. 14). When and how he became a physician is not known. (2) He was not one of the ‘eyewitnesses and servants of the word’ (Luke 1:2). (3) On the supposition of Luke’s being the author of the Acts we gather from those passages in which the first person *we* is employed that he joined Paul’s company at Troas and sailed with them to Macedonia (Acts 16:10-11). He accompanied Paul as far as Philippi (16:25-17:1) but did not share his persecution or leave the city, for here the third person *they* is used. The first person *we* does not reappear until Paul comes to Philippi at the end of his third journey (20:6), from which it is inferred that Luke spent the intervening time—a period of seven or eight years—in the city or neighborhood; and as the *we* continues to the end of the book, that Luke remained with Paul during his journey to Jerusalem (20:6-21:18), was that apostle’s companion to Rome (27:1), sharing his shipwreck (28:2), and reaching the imperial city by way of Syracuse and Puteoli (28:12-16). According to the epistles he continued to be one of Paul’s ‘fellow workers’ till the end of his first imprisonment (Philem 24; Col 4:14). The last glimpse of the ‘beloved physician’ discovers him to be faithful amid general defection (2 Tim 4:11). Tradition since the time of Gregory of Nazianzus makes Luke a martyr, yet not unanimously, since accounts of a natural death slip in. Where he died remains a question; certainly not in Rome with Paul, for his writings are far later ...’

¹ Col. 4:14

² II Tim. 4:9-11

³ Philem. Vv.3,4

⁴ Acts 16:6-10

About the Gospel of Luke and Acts, *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: ‘This Third Gospel was *most carefully composed*, with the view of satisfying the requirements of a thoughtful, cultured man, such as was probably that ‘most excellent Theophilus’ to whom the Gospel was addressed.

First, it contained, with its sequel the Acts, not a few historical notices, such as the census of Quirinius, under the decree of Augustus (... Acts 2:1-3); the contemporary Roman and Jewish rulers in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar (... Acts 3:1, 2); Pilate’s and Herod’s jurisdictions (chapter 23:1, 12); with allusions by name to public persons, such as Cornelius, centurion of the Italian band (... Acts 10:1); Herod (... Acts 12:1, etc.; 13:1); Sergius Paulus (... Acts 13:7); the Emperor Claudius’s decree (... Acts 18:2); Gallic the deputy of Achaia (... Acts 18:12-16); Claudius Lysias, Felix the Roman governor (... Acts 23:26); Porcius Festus (... Acts 24:27); King Agrippa and Bernice (Acts 25); the appeal to Caesar (... Acts 26:32).

Secondly, it embodied in its narrative that beautiful and interesting account of the nativity and the events which preceded it and immediately succeeded it, with a few notices of the boyhood of the Lord. These details ... were evidently procured from information communicated to St. Luke (or St. Paul) by eye-witnesses, many of the details probably by the virgin-mother herself. These two first chapters would answer many a question which would naturally suggest itself to reverent inquirers who had listened to the simple gospel message as first delivered, and had enrolled themselves among the followers of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, the picture of the gradual development of the Church of Jesus Christ is drawn with extraordinary skill and care by St. Luke — its development from Bethlehem and Nazareth to Jerusalem and Rome. On the morning of the nativity, in the opening chapters of St. Luke, the Church is confined to Joseph, Mary, and the holy Babe. To these, just the few shepherds of Bethlehem are added. The close of the Acts shows us the foundation of the Church at Rome; but Rome was but a branch, an offshoot, of the great Churches of Antioch and Jerusalem. St. Luke traces the various stages in this development — from Bethlehem to Nazareth, from Nazareth to Capernaum, from Capernaum to the Galilaeen and Peraean villages, then to Jerusalem. The Acts takes up the wondrous story, and shows how the Church, advanced from Jerusalem to the Syrian Antioch, from Antioch to the cities of Asia Minor, from great Asian centers like Ephesus across the seas to the old world-renowned cities of Greece, and then from Greece to Italy, and the story closes with the beginning of the Church at Rome. Nor does St. Luke alone depict with his great skill the *geographical* development of the Church of Jesus Christ. He describes, too, how the work of the Divine Master and his chosen instruments developed. First, we have the story of the birth and growth of the pioneer, John the Baptist; then the birth and childhood of Jesus himself. He paints the beginning of his organized Church, when he summons the twelve out of the number of believers who gathered round him soon after he began his public ministry among men. The wants of the growing organization soon called for more workers. In the Third Gospel the solemn summons of the seventy is related. For a moment the advancing work seems arrested by a fatal blow, and the death of the Master on the cross puts, as it seems, a final stop to the new Church and its work; but the Resurrection, which St. Luke describes as quickly following, gives a new and irresistible impulse to the Church and the Church’s work among men. The same men are at work, and the same Master is guiding their labors. But the homeless Master is no longer guiding them as they walked together among the fields of Galilee and the streets of Jerusalem, but from his glory-throne in heaven; and the men, the same men, are quite changed: it is as though they had drunk of the waters of another and stronger life.

Luke describes in the Acts, the sequel to his Gospel, the rapid progress and the swift though orderly development of the now great and numerous Church. Deacons are chosen to assist the apostles; then we read of prophets and teachers and elders, of the foundation-stories of a great and powerful organization.’

Date and Place of writing:

There is no certainty about the date at which this Gospel could be written. Most Bible scholars place it after the Gospel of Mark, which may have been written as early as 50 AD. It is obvious that Luke wrote his Gospel before writing Acts. And Acts must have been written before the death of the Apostle Paul, which occurred around 67 AD.

The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary observes about the date: ‘Since the book was written before the Acts, which is to be dated c. A.D. 61, it was likely written while Paul was at Caesarea. Since internal evidence that Luke wrote both the gospel and the book of Acts (and he divulges the fact that the gospel was written

first, Acts 1:1), it must be concluded that the gospel was penned prior to A.D. 61. Luke was in Caesarea where Paul was in prison (Acts 27:1). This circumstance would furnish him opportunity for the research he mentions with such fine literary style and classical flourish in Luke 1:1-4.' Whether this means that Luke wrote, while in Caesarea, cannot be ascertained.

Barnes' Notes observes the following about the place and time of the writing of this Gospel: 'It is not known *where* it was written. Jerome says it was composed in Achaia. There seems to be some probability that it was written to persons that were well acquainted with Jewish manners, as the author does not stop to explain the peculiar customs of the Jews, as some of the other evangelists have done. Respecting the *time* when it was written nothing very definite is known. All that can with certainty be ascertained is that it was written before the death of Paul (65 A.D.), for it was written before the Acts Acts 1:1, and that book only brings down the life of Paul to his imprisonment at Rome, and previous to his going into Spain.'

About Luke's identity, *Barnes' Notes* writes: 'It has been made a matter of inquiry whether Luke was a Gentile or a Jew. On this subject there is no positive testimony. Jerome and others of the fathers say that he was a Syrian, and born at Antioch. The most probable opinion seems to be that he was a proselyte to the Jewish religion, though descended from Gentile parents. For this opinion two reasons may be assigned of some weight. First, he was intimately acquainted, as appears by the Gospel and the Acts, with the Jewish rites, customs, opinions, and prejudices; and he wrote in their 'dialect,' that is, with much of the Hebrew phraseology, in a style similar to the other evangelists, from which it appears that he was accustomed to the Jewish religion, and was, therefore, probably a proselyte. Yet the 'preface' to his Gospel, as critics have remarked, is pure classic Greek, unlike the Greek that was used by native Jews; from which it seems not improbable that he was by birth and education a Gentile. Second, In Acts 21:27, it is said that the Asiatic Jews excited the multitude against Paul because he had introduced 'Gentiles' into the temple, thus defiling it. In Acts 21:28 it is said that the Gentile to whom they had reference was 'Trophimus,' an Ephesian. Yet 'Luke' was also at that time with Paul. If he had been regarded as 'a Gentile' it is probable that they would have made complaint respecting 'him' as well as 'Trophimus;' from which it is supposed that he was a Jewish proselyte.'

Characteristics of Luke's Gospel:

The Gospel of Luke has been called 'the most beautiful book ever written.' The style is charming and cultured and the way the stories are told is perfect.

In other studies we have put the question what difference it would make if we cut out of the Bible the book that is the subject of our investigation. How much of the Bible message would we lose if Luke were not one of the Gospels? One example provides sufficient proof: The Christmas Story. Without Luke Chapter Two there would be no Christmas, no angels, no shepherds, no baby in a manger, etc.

But how did Luke do it? He was not there when Jesus was born in Bethlehem; he was maybe not even born at that time. But Mary, the mother of Jesus was and she was probably one of the first persons to be interviewed by Luke.

We assume that Luke received his first instructions about the Gospel of Jesus Christ from or via the Apostle Paul, whose travel companion he eventually became. Luke may even have been one of Paul's converts. But even Paul had never known Jesus personally before his encounter with the risen and glorified Lord on the way to Damascus. Whether Paul had ever seen or heard Jesus before the crucifixion is doubtful. Although Paul could have given Luke a wealth of information about Christ's message, he could not provide and biographical details about the Savior or give details about certain highlights of His life and ministry.

The assumption is that those details were still well-known and passed on orally. From *The Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, we copy the following: 'A clue to the transition from oral preaching to written record is provided by explanatory statements in the Gospels of Luke and John. In the introduction to his Gospel, Luke asserts that he was undertaking to confirm by manuscript that his friend Theophilus had already learned by word of mouth (Luke 1:1-4). He spoke of facts which were taken for granted among believers, and indicated that there had already been numerous attempts to arrange them in orderly narratives. ... Luke affirmed on the contrary that he had derived his facts from those who 'from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word' (1:2). Not only had his informants shared in the events of which they

spoke, but also they had been so affected that they became propagandists of the new faith. Luke had been a contemporary of these witnesses, and had investigated personally of the truth of their claims that he might produce an orderly and accurate record of the work of Christ.’

Outline of the Book⁵

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PREFACE 1:1-4

1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

3 Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,

4 so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Luke's Gospel is the only of the four that is addressed to one person. His name is Theophilus, 'friend of God,' or 'loved of God.' We find the same name in the opening verse of the *Book of Acts*.⁶ *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* states about Theophilus: 'Tradition connects Theophilus with Antioch. The special adaptation of Luke's Gospel to Gentiles implies Theophilus was a Gentile. The epithet *kratiste*⁷ implies his rank, as also does the more elegant style of Luke's dedication (Luke 1:1-4) as compared with that of, the rest of the Gospel which is more derived from existing brief memoirs embodied by the evangelist. The idea of Theophilus being an imaginary person (the name meaning friend of God) is at variance with the simplicity of the New Testament writers and especially the evangelists.'

In the context of Greek culture the name Theophilus is rather unusual. George Knight in his *Commentary on the Psalms* tells the story of a Greek who, with his background of mythology and philosophy exclaimed, when hearing the words of the great commandment: 'Imagine that someone could really love his God!' Theophilus' name may be an indication that the Gospel of Jesus Christ changes cultures. That fact has been proven clearly in places where the indigenous culture was embedded by demonic influences. Upon hearing the Gospel message, people in those cultures realized that a break with their past and background had to be made before the message could be accepted.

Evidently, Theophilus had heard the facts about Christ's life, death and resurrection and accepted them in a way that changed his life. In this Gospel, Luke makes a special effort to assure his friend that what he had heard and believed was historically correct.

According to Luke, many people had begun to put the oral traditions on paper in order to preserve them for future generations. Luke may have been familiar with some of them, including the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. But from the way Luke describes it, it seems that he went to Israel in order to interview personally people who had been directly involved in the life of Jesus. From the fact that he gives us a very detailed description of some events leading up to the birth of Jesus and some of His early life, we assume that he met with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and got some of the story firsthand from her. Luke must also have met some of the Apostle, who were still living in Jerusalem at that time, and gathered valuable information from them, both about their experiences with Christ and about what happened after Pentecost, as we can read in *Acts*.

Barnes' Notes comments on the words 'Many have undertaken to draw up an account': 'It has been doubted who are referred to here by the word 'many.' It seems clear that it could not be the other evangelists, for the gospel by 'John' was not yet written, and the word 'many' denotes clearly more than 'two.' Besides, it is said that they undertook to record what the 'eye-witnesses' had delivered to them, so that the writers did not pretend to be eye-witnesses themselves. It is clear, therefore, that other writings are meant than the gospels which we now have, but what they were is a matter of conjecture. What are now known as spurious gospels were written long after Luke wrote his. It is probable that Luke refers to 'fragments' of history, or to narratives of 'detached' sayings, acts, or parables of our Lord, which had been made and circulated among the disciples and others. His doctrines were original, bold, pure, and authoritative. His miracles had been extraordinary, clear, and awful. His life and death had been peculiar; and it is not improbable-indeed it is highly probable that such broken accounts and narratives of detached facts would be preserved. That this is what Luke means appears farther from Luke 1:3, where 'he' professes to give a regular, full, and systematic account from the very beginning - 'having had perfect

⁶ Acts 1:1

⁷ 'noble'

understanding of ‘all things from the very first.’ The records of the others-the ‘many’ - were broken and incomplete. His were to be regular and full.’

In comparing Luke’s Gospel with the other three, we observe that none of the other Gospel writers were highly trained people. John was a simple fisherman as were some of the other disciples. He may have been intelligent and passionate, but he cannot have been very educated. Matthew, or Levi, as Mark calls him, must have had more training as he worked as a tax collector when Jesus called him.⁸ We know little of Mark, apart from the fact that he traveled some with the Apostle Paul and that he was a relative of Peter. As a physician, Luke must have had extensive schooling. His style of writing and the precision with which he organizes his material bespeaks a man of education. Luke was an exception to those whom Paul called ‘Not many ... wise by human standards; not many ... influential; not many ... of noble birth.’⁹

It is not education or the lack of it that forms the criterion of the Holy Spirit’s choice, but surrender and obedience to the will of God.

1. THE INFANCEY NARRATIVES 1:5 – 2:52

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, introduces this section with the following: ‘In this section (peculiar to Luke) we have our only information about the origins of John the Baptist and some unique information about the birth of Jesus. There are some notable parallels between the two birth stories. In both the angel Gabriel brought news of what was to happen, in both the circumstance of the birth and circumcision are narrated, and in both this is followed by prophetic utterances. Luke is bringing out the wonder of the Messianic age. Prophecy had ceased at the close of the Old Testament period; but now God was sending his Messiah and the prophetic gift was renewed. John is shown to have a special place in the Messianic happenings. There is no possibility of confusing him with the Messiah in Luke’s account, for he is but the forerunner (1:17). But there is no possibility either of missing his true greatness.

Both the language and the ideas of these chapters reflect a Semitic background. Luke may be translating a Hebrew or Aramaic document, or writing in imitation of the style of the Septuagint. On the whole it seems likely that he is reflecting his sources and that these came from Palestine.’

A. The birth of John foretold 1:5-25

5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.

6 Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly.

7 But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.

8 Once when Zechariah’s division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God,

9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

13 But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.

14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,

15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

⁸ Mark 2:14

⁹ I Cor. 1:26

16 Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God.

17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous — to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’

18 Zechariah asked the angel, ‘How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.’

19 The angel answered, ‘I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time.’

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.

22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home.

24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion.

25 ‘The Lord has done this for me,’ she said. ‘In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.’

We are first introduced to King Herod, who reigned from 37 – 4 B.C. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* writes about Herod, king of Judea: ‘This was Herod, surnamed the Great, the son of Antipater, an Idumean by birth, who had professed himself a proselyte to the Jewish religion, but regarded no religion, further than it promoted his secular interests and ambition. Thus, for the first time, the throne of Judah was filled by a person not of Jewish extraction, who had been forced upon the people by the Roman government.’

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia adds: ‘The name Herod (Herodes) is a familiar one in the history of the Jews and of the early Christian church. The name itself signifies ‘heroic,’ a name not wholly applicable to the family, which was characterized by craft and knavery rather than by heroism. The fortunes of the Herodian family are inseparably connected with the last flickerings of the flame of Judaism, as a national power, before it was forever extinguished in the great Jewish war of rebellion, 70 A.D. The history of the Herodian family is not lacking in elements of greatness, but whatever these elements were and in whomsoever found, they were in every case dimmed by the insufferable egotism which disfigured the family, root and branch. Some of the Herodian princes were undeniably talented; but these talents, wrongly used, left no marks for the good of the people of Israel. Of nearly all the kings of the house of Herod it may truly be said that at their death ‘they went without being desired,’ unmissed, unmourned. The entire family history is one of incessant brawls, suspicion, intrigue and shocking immorality. In the baleful and waning light of the rule of the Herodians, Christ lived and died, and under it the foundations of the Christian church were laid.’

Herod started out as governor of Galilee and was later appointed by the Roman government as king of Judea. It was under his reign that the temple, which was originally built by Solomon, was rebuilt. This was the edifice the disciples so admired when they said to Jesus: ‘Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!’¹⁰ It was this Herod who ordered the massacre of the infants in Bethlehem.¹¹

It is in the last days of Herod’s reign that Zechariah appears upon the Biblical scene in the story that introduces the annunciation of the birth of Jesus, preceded by the birth of John the Baptist. Since Jesus’ birth is calculated to have occurred at 4 B.C., the events described here must have taken place in the year preceding this. Luke briefly mentions the background and family in which John would be born. Both parents, Zechariah and Elisabeth, were descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses and the first high priest

¹⁰ Mark 13:1

¹¹ Matt. 2:16

in the Jewish religious system. Zechariah traced his roots back to Abijah, one of the priests who returned from the Babylonian captivity.¹²

Luke describes the elderly couple as upright and blameless, using the Greek adjectives *dikaïos*, ‘righteous’ and *amemptos*, ‘irreproachable.’ We must not look at this couple through the glasses of the Apostle Paul and apply to them the same meaning of righteousness Paul attaches to it, as being only available in Christ. These people lived in the context of the Old Testament ceremonial law and adhered strictly to its precepts; meaning that they obeyed the commandments and brought the prescribed sacrifices. Whether this meant that they loved God with all their heart and soul, cannot be established.

We do not read how old they were and whether it would still be physically possible for them to have children. The fact was that they had, obviously, been married many years and Elisabeth had never become pregnant. Theirs may not have been the same condition in which Abraham and Sarah were when Isaac was born. It is obvious that, for years, they had prayed for children, but their prayers seemed to have fallen on deaf ears. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about this condition: ‘It was not infrequently looked on as a mark of the Divine displeasure, possibly as the punishment of some grave sin.’

Zechariah was chosen by lot to enter into the holy place of the temple and offer the sacrifice of incense on the golden altar that stood in front of the veil. Evidently, this was a high honor. According to some Bible scholars there may have been twenty thousand priests, standing in line to perform this ceremony and to be chosen to do so was considered the chance of a lifetime, never to be repeated.

It is good to bear this in mind when trying to imagine the emotional condition in which Zechariah must have been as he entered the holy place to perform his duty. At that point the angel Gabriel appears to this priest and tells him that his prayer for his wife to become pregnant has been heard. Zechariah must have known about Gabriel, as he had to be familiar with Daniel’s experiences.¹³

It can be a shocking thing to be confronted with the supernatural. There is a world of difference between keeping the law and obeying the commandments and meeting a supernatural being. It gave Zechariah the shock of his life to the point where he doubted the reality of what he experienced. It may sound strange to us that he expressed doubt in response to the Gabriel’s message, but some of this may be attributed to the overwhelming character of this meeting. When Daniel had his encounter with angels, he describes how he fainted and had to be strengthened before he could hear what they had to say. We read: ‘I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.’¹⁴

Israel’s spiritual condition at that time resembled the days of Samuel, in which ‘the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.’¹⁵ No prophet had appeared upon the scene for about four hundred years. The time may have been considered to be the lowest point in Israel’s history. Yet, the Apostle Paul calls it rightfully ‘the fullness of the time.’¹⁶

The Greek text of v.11 reads literally: ‘And when Zechariah saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.’ The Greek word for ‘troubled’ is *tarasso*, which is the same word used in the story about the pool of Bethesda in which the water was ‘stirred’ when ‘an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water.’¹⁷

Gabriel’s message ought to have stirred Zechariah with joy and exuberance, but he was, evidently, not ready for this good news. He was going to have a son, who would be the ‘joy and delight’ of his life, who would ‘be great in the sight of the Lord.’ He would be a Nazarite and ‘filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.’ He would be Israel’s great evangelist. An announcement of fatherhood in itself would have been

¹² Neh. 12:4

¹³ See Dan. 8:16; 9:21.

¹⁴ Dan. 10:8,9

¹⁵ I Sam. 3:1

¹⁶ Gal. 4:4 - KJV

¹⁷ John 5:4 - NKJV

overwhelming enough. His son would be the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy.¹⁸ This was more than Zechariah could take in at one moment. He expressed doubt, actually saying 'I am too old for this.'

Bible scholars are unanimous in condemning Zechariah for his lack of faith. Reference is made to the experience of Abraham and Sarah, not taking into consideration the amount of doubt evinced by both of them in their case. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: 'As God is glorified by implicit confidence in His promises-and just in proportion to the natural obstacles in the way of fulfillment-so unbelief like that of Zacharias here is regarded as a dishonor put upon His word, and resented accordingly.' It is true that Gabriel showed little sympathy for Zechariah's doubt, as Jesus expressed aggravation about His disciples' lack of faith.¹⁹

Gabriel's reply to Zechariah's doubt is severe. He tells Zechariah who he is and what position he occupies in his heavenly service. Zechariah's doubt about the word of God's ambassador reflects doubt upon the One who sent him.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary comments on Gabriel's name: 'The original *Gabry'el* is exceedingly expressive: it is compounded of *geber*, and '*el*, the might of the strong God. An angel with such a name was exceedingly proper for the occasion; as it pointed out that all-prevalent power by which the strong God could accomplish every purpose, and subdue all things to himself.

This is in allusion to the case of the prime minister of an eastern monarch, who alone has access to his master at all times; and is therefore said, in the eastern phrase, to see the presence, or to be in the presence. From the allusion we may conceive the angel Gabriel to be in a state of high favor and trust before God.'

Gabriel used his divine authority to impose a punishment upon Zechariah. The verdict was that he would be unable to speak until the birth of his son John.

It may be good at this point to consider the relationship between angels and humans. We usually assume that angel rank above human beings in God's order of creation. The author of Hebrews, however, writes: 'To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?'²⁰ It is true that the quotation pertains primarily to the person of Jesus Christ, but the reference in that context is to His humanity, not to His deity. In the order of creation Zechariah ranked above Gabriel, however strange that may sound to us. Zechariah was a link in the chain of salvation which the angel Gabriel could not fully understand or experience. Speaking about the Old Testament prophets, Peter writes: 'It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.'²¹ Gabriel knew this, of course, but Zechariah was unaware of his own status and worth. This must have made Zechariah's lack of faith so inexplicable to the angel.

Meanwhile the people, who had come to the temple to worship, waited for Zechariah to come out and pronounce a blessing upon them. They began to wonder what took the priest so long. Luke may have met some who were present in the crowd as teenagers at that time. It is very doubtful that either Zechariah or Elisabeth was still alive when Luke did the research for his Gospel in Jerusalem. Most Bible scholars believe that the ritual Zechariah had to perform would not take more than about half an hour. When Zechariah stayed inside the holy place for a much longer time, people may have thought that something had happened to him.

The Pulpit Commentary states: 'The Talmud tells us that even the high priest did not tarry long in the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement. The same feeling of holy awe would induce the ministering priest of the day to perform his functions with no unnecessary delay, and to leave as soon as possible the holy place. The people praying in the court without were in the habit of waiting until the priest on duty came out of the sacred inner chamber, after which they were dismissed with the blessing. The unusual delay in the appearance of Zacharias puzzled and disturbed the worshippers.'

¹⁸ See Mal. 4:5.

¹⁹ Matt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8, etc.

²⁰ Heb. 1:13,14

²¹ I Peter 1:12

When Zechariah finally appeared and uttered no speech but only made motions while giving the blessing to the people, the crowd realized that something unusual had happened to him inside the temple.

Supposedly, the term of service for a priest was one week. We don't know how far into his term Zechariah had come when the encounter with Gabriel occurred, but we learn that he served out the rest of his time before returning home. He was unable to speak, but he could still perform his priestly duties in the temple.

When Zechariah returns home, Elisabeth becomes pregnant and goes into hiding. We are not told the reason for this. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* states: 'When a Hindu female is pregnant of her first child, she avoids the presence of those with whom she was before familiar, as a point of delicacy.' But Elisabeth was not a Hindu, and it would seem more to be a point of delicacy if she would keep herself secluded toward the end when her pregnancy would have become more obvious. There must have been some custom that was observed in Israel of which we are not aware. The fact that her pregnancy would be considered to be an indication that God had shown her His favor and taken away her disgrace among the people, would seem the more reason for her to show herself in public. But that was not the case.

B. The birth of Jesus foretold 1:26-38

26 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,

27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

28 The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.'

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

30 But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.

31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,

33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.'

34 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'

35 The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.

37 For nothing is impossible with God.'

38 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her.

From Zechariah's story and Elisabeth's pregnancy, Luke moves to the story of Mary, a young girl who lived in Nazareth, Galilee. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: 'From Josephus we learn that at this period the northern division was rich and populous, and covered with flourishing towns. Nazareth, which still exists as a large village of some three thousand inhabitants, under the name of En-Nazirah, is about twenty-four miles to the east of the Lake of Tiberius.'

The following story is probably the fruit of a personal interview Luke had with Mary, who must have been an elderly woman at that time.

The same Gabriel, who had appeared to Daniel in the days of Babylonian captivity and to Zechariah a few months earlier, was now sent on a specific mission to Mary for the annunciation of the birth of the Messiah. The time mentioned is the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy.

We are told that Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Mary's descent from David is not mentioned here, but it is assumed to appear in the genealogy Luke provides later on.

On the matter of betrothal, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* writes: ‘The Jewish law held espousal or engagement to be as binding as marriage. An engagement was completed after negotiations had been carried on by the groom’s representative and the dowry money had been paid to the girl’s father. After the betrothal, the groom could claim the bride at any time. The legal aspect of marriage was included in the betrothal; the wedding was merely a recognition of the agreement that had already been established. Joseph had a perfect right to travel with Mary to Bethlehem.’

The greeting Gabriel gives to Mary reads literally in the Greek text: ‘Hail, you are highly favored, the Lord [is] with you: [blessed are you among women].’ The last part of the phrase does not appear in the oldest manuscripts and is probably a later addition. This text has become the basis for a prayer used in the Roman Catholic Church and known as ‘Ave Maria.’ The Greek word for ‘hail’ is *chairo*, ‘be cheerful.’ It is a word of joy, as is obvious from the way the Apostle Paul uses it in his letter to the Philippians: ‘*Rejoice* in the Lord always. I will say it again: *Rejoice!*’²² ‘Highly favored’ is the translation of the Greek word *charitoo*, which is obviously related to *chairo*.

Mary’s immediate reaction to the greeting was not rejoicing, but fear. The Greek word used is *diatarasso*, ‘to be agitated,’ ‘to be alarmed.’ Both the presence of an angel and the content of the greeting would be enough to upset her. As in the encounter with Zechariah, Gabriel has to pronounce *meé foboú*, ‘fear not,’ a phrase that seems to be needed for the emotional restoration of everyone who meets with an angel.

Mary is told to be the recipient of God’s grace. Again the Greek word *charis* is used, which was used earlier in different form. What Maria heard was probably *Shalom*, the everyday Jewish greeting, meaning ‘peace.’

Commenting on this greeting, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: ‘It is, of course, a complete misunderstanding to translate ‘Hail Mary, full of grace,’ and understand the words to mean that Mary would be a source of grace to other people. Gabriel is saying simply that God’s favor rests on her. He goes on to explain that she will *conceive* and *bear a son* (cf. Isa. 7:14). As with John earlier, the angel names the child: *you shall call his name Jesus* (= Heb. Joshua = ‘The Lord is salvation’).’

The Greek text of v.32 reads literally: ‘He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.’ The Name of God, ‘the Highest,’ *hupsistos*, is a reference to the Old Testament Name Elyon, which is probably the Name Gabriel used here. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* explains: ‘This name (‘elyon, ‘highest’) is a derivative of ‘alah, ‘to go up.’ It is used of persons or things to indicate their elevation or exaltation: of Israel, favored above other nations (Deut 26:19), of the aqueduct of ‘the upper pool’ (Isa 7:3), etc. This indicates that its meaning when applied to God is the ‘Exalted One,’ who is lifted far above all gods and men. It occurs alone (Deut 32:8; Ps 18:13), or in combination with other names of God, most frequently with El (Gen 14:18; Ps 78:35), but also with Yahweh (Ps 7:17; 97:9), or with Elohim (Ps 56:2 the King James Version; 78:56). Its early use (Gen 14:18 f) points to a high conception of Deity, an unquestioned monotheism in the beginnings of Hebrew history.’

Jesus being the Son of the Most High refers to His deity as the Second Person of the Trinity. Although the word ‘Trinity’ does not occur in Scripture, the obvious revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit cannot be denied. The fact that Jesus would inherit the throne of David speaks of His humanity. Both Joseph and Mary being from the line of David, this part of Gabriel’s message to Mary would have been understood as a promise of restoration of the nation of Israel as a literal kingdom instead of a people as part of the Roman Empire, as it was at that time. But taking it only in this literal sense puts limitations on the message that are unwarranted. When Jesus stood before Pilate a few hours before His death on the cross, Pilate questioned Him about the claim that He was a king. We read the dialogue: ‘Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘Is that your own idea,’ Jesus asked, ‘or did others talk to you about me?’ ‘Am I a Jew?’ Pilate replied. ‘It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?’ Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.’ ‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a

²² Phil. 4:4

king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’ ‘What is truth?’ Pilate asked.’²³

The original concept of the kind of kingdom God had in mind for Israel and for this world is expressed in the words He spoke to the nation at Mount Sinai: ‘Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’²⁴ Israel was meant to be a royal priesthood, ‘a kingdom of priests,’ a nation standing between God and the rest of the world with a testimony of salvation in the forgiveness of sin. Israel never understood what God wanted her to be. David was the only king who understood some of what it meant that Israel was a theocracy. What Gabriel is saying to Mary about Jesus occupying the throne of David means that the whole world will eventually become a theocracy in which the Son of God, and the Son of David will reign forever and ever.

Mary’s question ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’ was not a demonstration of doubt as was Zechariah’s question. The Greek text reads literally: ‘How shall this be, since I know not a man?’ The word ‘know’ here has the meaning of having sexual intercourse, as in ‘And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived.’²⁵ As we saw earlier, Mary was engaged to be married with Joseph, but pre-marital sex was considered inappropriate in Israel.

Gabriel then proceeds to explain to Mary the way the Incarnation would occur. As in all human pregnancies, two elements are needed, the female egg and the male sperm. Mary would provide the first and the Holy Spirit would create the second in Mary’s womb. Much has been written about this subject as well about the fact that the way Jesus was born made Him to be called ‘Son of God.’

The fact that this conception was miraculous is beyond doubt. Nothing equal to this had ever happened in creation. To dismiss the miracle because it would have been impossible, as some theologians state, denies the essence of the miraculous. Miracles, by virtue of their definition, tend to be impossible. To think that the Creator of the human body and of life itself would not be able to cause a pregnancy of the kind produced in the body of the virgin Mary, casts doubt on what the Almighty can do.

One of the interesting features of the text before us is the fact that it was researched and written by a physician. Luke, if anybody, would know how pregnancies occur. The fact that he reported this story proves that he believed it to be true.

The fact that God chose Mary to be the mother of His Son in the physical sense of the word, made Mary, in fact, ‘highly favored.’ On the other hand, her pregnancy would be considered reprehensible and indecent by those who knew that she was not married. One person who would think this was her husband-to-be Joseph. As Matthew records, it took divine revelation to Joseph for him to accept the fact that Mary had not committed sin. We read: ‘This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.’²⁶ But in the eyes of the general public both Mary and Joseph would be considered to have behaved improperly.

The Greek text of v.35 reads literally: ‘And the angel answered [and] said unto her, [The] Holy Ghost shall come upon you, [and] the power of the Highest shall overshadow you: therefore [that] holy thing which shall be born [of you] shall be called [the] Son of God.’

The Pulpit Commentary comments: ‘The expression of Gabriel, ‘the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee,’ reminds us of the opening words of Genesis, where the writer describes the dawn of life in creation in the words, ‘The Spirit of God moved [or, ‘brooded’] over the face of the deep.’ The Word was conceived in the womb of a woman, not after the manner of men, but by the singular, powerful,

²³ John 18:33-38

²⁴ Ex. 19:5,6

²⁵ Gen. 4:1 – KJV

²⁶ Matt 1:18-20

invisible, immediate operation of the Holy Ghost, whereby a virgin was, beyond the law of nature, enabled to conceive, and that which was conceived in her was originally and completely sanctified.’

The miraculous conception of Jesus was needed in order to give Him a human nature that did not inherit Adam’s sin, as all babies bring with them into the world. The fact that human life is transmitted by the father means that we all inherit our sinful nature from the paternal side of the family. Jesus was the only human being who could ever say: ‘Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me?’²⁷

Next Gabriel informs Mary about Elisabeth’s pregnancy. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on this: ‘Evidently Mary had not heard of Elizabeth’s experience. Gabriel now informs her that it is *the sixth month* of her pregnancy. Mary will see that *with God nothing will be impossible* (cf. Gen. 18:14). She must be encouraged by Elizabeth’s experience. Some have concluded from the fact that Elizabeth is Mary’s *kinswoman* that Mary must have been of the family of Aaron, as Elizabeth was (5). They conclude that, if we accept the virgin birth, Jesus was not descended from David, but this is to go too far too fast. All the conditions are satisfied if one of Mary’s parents was of David’s family and the other of Aaron’s. The reference to Jesus as descended from David (32), made when Joseph’s reaction was as yet undetermined, shows that Mary must have been able to claim Davidic descent.’

It is obvious that Elizabeth’s pregnancy, although wondrous, was not the same kind of miracle Mary was to experience. Gabriel mentioned it, however, in order to boost Mary’s faith that if God does that for a woman who was beyond the age of childbearing, He could certainly do it for a young girl of her age. Gabriel’s statement: ‘For nothing is impossible with God’ also can be seen as a reference to Sarah’s pregnancy, when she was told ‘Is anything too hard for the Lord?’²⁸

Mary’s answer, ‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ is an act of complete surrender. The Greek text of v.38 reads literally: ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word.’ The Greek word used for ‘handmaid’ is *doule*, which is the feminine of *doulos*, ‘slave.’ It is important to understand that Mary’s consent was needed. God did not force her into this. As human beings we have the awesome power to refuse the will of God. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: ‘The slave-girl could not but do the will of her Master. This is reinforced with *let it be to me according to your word*. We are apt to take this as the most natural thing and accordingly we miss Mary’s quiet heroism. She was not yet married to Joseph. His reaction to her pregnancy might have been expected to be a strong one and Matthew tells us that he did in fact think of divorcing her (Matt. 1:19). Again, while the death penalty for adultery (Deut. 22:23f.) does not seem to have been carried out often, it was still there. Mary could not be sure that she would not have to suffer, perhaps even die. But she recognized the will of God and accepted it.’

C. Mary’s visit to Elizabeth 1:39-45

39 *At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth.*

41 *When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.*

42 *In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!’*

43 *But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?’*

44 *As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*

45 *Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!’*

We may assume that Mary lost no time in going to visit Elizabeth. It cannot be determined exactly where Zechariah and Elizabeth lived. If the priests and Levites still lived at that time in the towns allocated to them by Joshua, the place in Judea would be Hebron,²⁹ which was about 70 miles south of Nazareth. For a person traveling by foot that was not a mean distance, particularly if the traveler was a pregnant woman.

²⁷ John 8:46

²⁸ Gen. 18:14

²⁹ See Josh. 20:7.

Assuming again that Mary became pregnant immediately after the angelic visitation, she must have been not more than a few weeks in that condition when she arrived at Zechariah and Elizabeth's home.

Mary's visit to Elizabeth turned out to be one of great encouragement for her. If ever there had been any doubt in her heart, of which we do not read, that doubt would certainly have been taken away by the greeting she receives from Elizabeth.

Mary greets Elizabeth upon entering the house, probably by saying 'Shalom.' Upon hearing Mary's voice, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, as is, evidently, the fetus within her. Unborn John may have leaped and kicked earlier, since fetuses do so during that stage of pregnancies. But the filling by the Holy Spirit and the simultaneous kicking of the unborn baby at the sound of Mary's voice, provide Elizabeth with a clear insight of the situation. Since Mary had not heard about Elizabeth's pregnancy before the angel told her, we may assume that Elizabeth was, up to that point, unaware of Mary's experience. All this is revealed to her instantaneously. The Greek text of Elizabeth's blessing of Mary reads literally: 'Blessed [are] you among women, and blessed [is] the fruit of your womb.'

The Greek word used is *eulogeo*, which means 'to bless,' or 'to invoke a benediction.' The English word 'eulogy' is derived from it. Elizabeth recognizes Mary as her superior in the sense that the baby she carries will be greater than the one in her own womb. She calls Mary 'the mother of my Lord.' Elizabeth was the first woman in the New Testament who recognized Jesus as her Lord. In this she joined King David, who had sung in one of his Psalms: 'The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.''³⁰

A final encouragement for Mary is in the confirmation Elizabeth gives her about her faith in the message Gabriel had given to her. Earlier, Mary was called heroic because of her surrender to the will of God for her life. She may have suffered some attacks from the enemy of her soul since that time. We don't read any about this, but Mary must have been subject to 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that flesh is heir to.' Here, the Holy Spirit gives her the encouragement she needs in the words of Elizabeth.

D. The song of Mary 1:46-56

46 And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name.

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.'

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

Mary's song of praise is in answer to Elizabeth's greeting in which she expressed to feel honored by the fact that Mary came to visit her.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, introduces this section as follows: 'The song of Mary (called Magnificat from its opening word in the Latin translation) is an outburst of praise largely in Old testament language. In particular there are several resemblances to the song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:-10). But there is a difference in

³⁰ Ps. 110:1

tone. Hannah's song is a shout of triumph in the face of her enemies; Mary's a humble contemplation of the mercies of God.'

Mary's song of praise is an amazing piece of poetry. We can hardly imagine how a simple uneducated teenage girl from Nazareth could come up with such a piece of art. It is obvious that the Holy Spirit is the actual poet in her.

It is difficult to determine what makes words into poetry. Words in themselves are miracles in that they are formed by sound that represents meaning. But not all words that convey meaning are beautiful also. It is when the beauty of the Lord enters into the meaning of words that language turns into poetry. This study is not the place to look for definitions of beauty. Dissecting a thing kills it. We will do better to let Mary's words roll over us and be refreshed by them.

The first thing Mary does in her song is glorify God. The Greek word used is *megaluno*, 'to make great,' or 'to extol.' What she is saying is that God showed His glory in her life.

The Pulpit Commentary observes about vv.46b-48: 'This is the first of the four divisions of the Magnificat. In it she speaks of herself, and her deep feelings of adoration and of holy joy, and of intense glad surprise. It is a prayer, but the highest kind of prayer, for it asks for nothing — it simply breathes adoration and thankfulness. We may imagine the angels praying thus. They have all that created beings, however exalted, can desire in the beatific vision which they perpetually enjoy; and yet they pray continually, but only after this manner. The joy of her spirit, notice, is based on the fact of the revelation that he, God, was, too, her Savior; and, of course, not hers only: her great joy was in the thought of the salvation of the suffering, sinning world around her. Then she passes into simple wonderment that she should have been chosen as the instrument of the boundless goodness of God. She had nothing to recommend her only her low estate. Though royally descended, she only occupied a position among the humblest Hebrew maidens, and yet, owing to God's favor, she will be deemed blessed by countless unborn generations.'

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary adds this beautiful comment: 'And Mary said - Magnificent canticle! in which the strain of Hannah's ancient song, in like circumstances, is caught up, and just slightly modified and sublimed. Is it unnatural to suppose that the spirit of the blessed Virgin had been drawn beforehand into mysterious sympathy with the ideas and the tone of this hymn, so that when the life and fire of inspiration penetrated her whole soul it spontaneously swept the chords of this song, enriching the Hymnal of the Church with that spirit-stirring canticle which has resounded ever since from its temple walls? In both songs those holy women-filled with wonder to behold 'the proud, the mighty, the rich,' passed by, and, in their persons, the lowliest chosen to usher in the greatest events-sing of this as being no exceptional movement but a great law of the kingdom of God, by which He delights to 'put down the mighty from their seats, and exalt them of low degree.' In both songs the strain dies away on CHRIST; in Hannah's, under the name of 'Yahweh's King,' to whom, through all His line from David onwards to Himself, He will 'give strength,' and as His 'Anointed,' whose horn He will exalt (1 Sam 2:10); in the Virgin's song, it is as the 'Help' promised to Israel by all the prophets.'

In this hymn Mary pours herself out before God body, soul and spirit. Her body carried the Son of God; her soul, that is her emotions, reason and will, lift themselves up before her Creator; and her spirit, the organ of fellowship with God, adores. The fact that Mary calls God 'my Savior' indicates not only that she sees her self as a sinner in need of salvation, but also that what happened to her elevated her from being an insignificant young girl in an unknown small village, to one of the most important persons in the universe. There is a sense in which John's picture of the woman in Revelation must be applied to Mary. We read: 'A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared

for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.³¹ I am not saying that the above verses must be applied exclusively to Mary, but the first application undoubtedly refers to her.

John's revelation suggests that Mary did not go through smooth sailing from the moment of the annunciation to the actual time of birth. She must have experienced attacks by the enormous red dragon and suffered fear and anxiety at certain times. Her Magnificat, which she sings here, is an act of defiance and a declaration of victory of grace over evil. Her singing of God's praises is decisive for what follows.

When Mary responded to the angel's announcement by saying 'I am the Lord's servant,' she actually sold herself into slavery. She immediately made the discovery that her act propelled her to a height of honor that she could not have dreamed of in her wildest imagination. God made her an example of surrender and humble obedience that would become a monument throughout the remainder of world history. All generations unborn would call Mary the most blessed of all women ever born. There is a healthy way to celebrate Mary's ascent even in our present day.

Without wishing to be overly critical of the Roman Catholic Church, the doctrines of that church that have elevated the Virgin Mary above what the Scriptures reveal, have done much harm to the interpretation of Mary's words to the point where she has become 'the immaculate conception,' 'the mother of God,' 'Intercessor in the link of prayer directed to the Son and the Father,' 'Queen of heaven,' etc. The enemy may have tried to do here what the Roman soldiers did at Jesus' crucifixion. We read: 'Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.'³² Both kinds of excesses betray the enemy's hand.

Jesus would later say: 'My Father will honor the one who serves me.'³³ Mary had already begun to experience that and she proclaims that this will be what the Father will do throughout all generation, both while we are on earth and when we enter His eternal glory.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on vv.49-53: 'From thankfulness for what God has done for her (46-49a) Mary turns to his wider activities (49b-53). She dwells on three things, his power, his holiness and his mercy. She sees herself as insignificant, but that does not matter, for 'the Mighty One' ... is at work. But God is not to be thought of only in terms of power. He is *holy*. The *name* in antiquity was used with a fuller meaning than with us: it stood for the whole person. So this verse means not simply that God's name is a holy name and must be used reverently; it means that God is a holy God. Further, he is merciful. In every generation *his mercy* (*mercy* occurs five times in this chapter) is certain for those who reverence him (so, rather than *fear him* in our sense of the term).

The impression left by an English translation is that Mary continues to recite God's habitual actions. But we have a series of six aorist tenses in the Greek which are most unlikely to have this meaning. Mary may be looking back to specific occasions in the past when God has done the things she mentions. [One Bible scholar] takes this view and comments. 'Only because the mighty Lord has done mighty things is there good news to tell, only because of the past tenses which speak of God's deeds is there a gospel to proclaim.' Or Mary may be referring to acts still future but which have begun to be realized. It is perhaps more likely that she is looking forward in a spirit of prophecy and counting what God will do as so certain that it can be spoken of as accomplished (this is frequent in the Old Testament prophets). This section of song tells of a complete reversal of human values. It is not *the proud* or *the mighty* or *the rich* who have the last word. Indeed, through his Messiah, God is about to overthrow all these. *The proud* are spoken of with reference to *the imagination of their hearts*, i.e. it is proud thoughts that are in mind and not simply arrogant actions. *The mighty* are on *thrones*; Mary is speaking of those actually ruling (NEB, 'monarchs'), not simply of powerful people. There is a revolutionary note about filling *the hungry* and sending the *rich* away *empty*. In the ancient world it was accepted that the rich would be well cared for. Poor people must

³¹ Rev. 12:1-6

³² Matt. 27:27-31

³³ John 12:26

expect to be hungry. But Mary sings of a God who is not bound by what people do. He turns human attitudes and order of society upside down.’

Mary ends her hymn by connecting her own anticipation of the birth of Jesus to God’s historical relationship with the people of Israel. What was going to happen in the birth of Christ was the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, which carried through his sons up to that day. The Greek text of v.54 reads literally: ‘He has helped Israel, his servant in remembrance of his mercy.’ The verb rendered ‘has helped’ is *antilambanomai*, ‘to take hold of,’ ‘to succor.’ It can also mean ‘to become a partaker.’ In connecting her pregnancy to God’s promise to Abraham: ‘All peoples on earth will be blessed through you,’³⁴ Mary shows that the birth of her Son would be the fulfillment of the whole history of salvation in which the nation of Israel played the most decisive role. At this point in her life, Mary could not foresee how what would happen to her Son in His suffering and horrible death, would pierce her soul like a sword. Her joy of that moment was the joy of resurrection that would follow and life-without-end. As the above quoted verses from Revelation indicate, Mary’s suffering would be like the suffering of those who go through the great tribulation.

Mercifully, none of that was on Mary’s mind at that moment. She spent the first several months of her pregnancy with Elizabeth and Zechariah. She may have stayed till the birth of John. The angel had told her that Elizabeth was six month pregnant. Mary’s staying for three months would bring that pregnancy to nine.

E. The birth and naming of John 1:57-66

57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.

58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah,

60 but his mother spoke up and said, ‘No! He is to be called John.’

61 They said to her, ‘There is no one among your relatives who has that name.’

62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.

63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, ‘His name is John.’

64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.

65 The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things.

66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, ‘What then is this child going to be?’ For the Lord’s hand was with him.

When Elizabeth gives birth to her baby, a son, her neighbors and relatives interpret this as an act of God’s mercy. The Greek word used is *eleos*, ‘compassion.’ The same word occurs 4 times in this chapter, twice in Mary’s Magnificat and once in Zechariah’s hymn of praise.

The circumcision of a baby was a special event in Israel to which, evidently, friends and relatives were invited. It was also the day at which the baby was given a name. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: ‘This was always, among the Hebrew people, a solemn day of rejoicing; it resembled in some particulars our baptismal gatherings. Relatives were invited to be present, as witnesses that the child had been formally incorporated into the covenant.’ The commentary’s reference to ‘our baptismal gatherings’ must be taken in the context of the theological background of the commentator.

The custom to circumcise on the eighth day after the birth of a baby boy dates from the time of Abraham. When God made His covenant with Abraham, He said: ‘For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought

³⁴ Gen. 12:3

with money from a foreigner — those who are not your offspring.³⁵ That custom was later incorporated into the Levitical law: ‘On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised.’³⁶ Whether the giving of the name was done on the same day in Old Testament times is not known. That may be a custom developed at later times. Evidently, it was customary at the time John the Baptist was born.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about the name giving: ‘The Romans names boys on the ninth day and the Greeks did so on the seventh or the tenth. There seems no reason for rejecting [the] view that Luke happens to be the first to mention a custom that the Jews had developed. It is curious that the relations try to name the child, as that was the privilege of the parents. Perhaps they simply took it for granted that the boy would be named after the father. This was far from inevitable (few New Testament men seem to be so named). But in some Jewish writing it is taken as customary.’ One reason why friends and relatives suggested to name the boy Zechariah may have been the fact that the father himself was unable to speak, and, evidently, also deaf at this point.

Elizabeth objected to the suggestion on the basis of the word of Gabriel to Zechariah,³⁷ which the latter must have communicated to her, evidently by writing. The Greek form of the name is *Ioannes*, meaning ‘Yahweh is gracious.’ The friends and neighbors object, stating that the name did not occur in the family. As Western observers we wonder what business they had in objecting, as if naming a child was not primarily the right of the parents. It could be that the visitors simply wanted to be helpful, since Zechariah was unable to express himself vocally. It would have been interesting to follow the conversation carried on in sign language. Eventually, Zechariah is given a writing tablet and he writes, in obedience to Gabriel’s word: ‘John is his name.’ Then the miracle occurs and Zechariah is healed instantaneously.

Not only the miracle of Zechariah’s healing but also the way little Johnny grew into John became the topic of conversation among the people living in the hill country of Judea. No further details are given as to what were the extraordinary features in the life of young John. We only read ‘the Lord’s hand was with him.’ In stating this Luke runs ahead of his story, to which he returns in the following verses.

F. The song of Zechariah 1:67-80

67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

68 ‘Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.

69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David

70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—

72 to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,

73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear

75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, 77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,

78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.’

80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.

³⁵ Gen. 17:12

³⁶ Lev. 12:3

³⁷ See Luke 1:13.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, introduces this section with the following: ‘Zechariah’s joy overflows in an inspired song (known as the Benedictus from its opening word in Latin). It may be divided into four strophes: thanksgiving for the Messiah (68-70), the great deliverance (71-75), the place of John (76-77), and the Messianic salvation (78-79). [Some Bible scholars] speak of it as the ‘last Prophecy of the Old Dispensation, and the first of the New.’ Some see the song as primarily political with an emphasis on the overcoming of Israel’s enemies (71-74), and add that a Christian at the end of the century would not have composed so Jewish a poem. We may agree that there is an authentic Jewish note, but it should not be overlooked that the deliverance from enemies is specifically related to serving God (74). The song is religious rather than political.’

The observation that some call Zechariah’s hymn of praise ‘political,’ shows how difficult it is for modern man to imagine what a theocracy would look like. Israel was intended to be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ In such a kingdom there cannot be a line that divides that which is spiritual from that which is political. Also, the One who inspired such ‘political’ language was the Holy Spirit.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes about Zechariah being ‘Filled with the Holy Spirit’: ‘This phrase is used eight times in the Lukan writings, including two previous occurrences in this chapter (Luke 1:15,41). In all eight instances it is connected with equipment for speech or preaching. It implies a special control and preparation by the Spirit for delivering a message from God.’

In Zechariah’s mind, the redemption of God’s people is already an accomplished fact. As we saw above, Mary may still have been present when Zechariah burst out in this hymn of praise. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments about the fact that Zechariah places future fulfillments in the past tense: ‘He speaks by the spirit of prophecy, which calls things that are not, as though they were; because they are absolutely determined by the Most High, and shall be all fulfilled in their season. God visits his people in the incarnation of Jesus Christ; therefore this Christ is called by him, *Kurios ho Theos*, Yahweh the God of Israel. Here the highest and most glorious character of the Supreme Being is given to Christ.’

The Greek text of v.68 reads literally: ‘Blessed [be the] Lord God of Israel; for he has visited and redeemed his people.’ The Greek word, rendered ‘blessed’ is *eulogetos*, which is derived from a word meaning ‘adorable.’ It is sometimes used as a noun, referring to God, as in ‘Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of *the Blessed One*?’’³⁸

About the image of the ‘horn,’ Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: ‘The *horn* was a symbol of strength (as with the horn of a bull), so that *a horn of salvation* means ‘a mighty salvation’ or ‘a strong savior.’’ *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states about the image: ‘The horns of an ox were a symbol of power. Many passages in the OT use this figure of speech, especially in the Psalms (cf. Ps 18:2; 89:24; 132:17; 148:14).’

The Greek word used here, rendered ‘redeemed,’ is *lutrosis*, which carries the meaning of ‘paying a ransom.’

The mention of the house of David is, undoubtedly a reference to Mary’s pregnancy. It also refers to the message the prophet Nathan delivered to King David when the latter contemplated building a temple for the worship of God. We read: ‘The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.’³⁹

The Pulpit Commentary states about Zechariah’s mention of the prophets: ‘Zacharias looked on all that was then happening as clearly foretold in those sacred prophetic writings preserved in the nation with so much care and reverence. Which have been since the world began. He considered Messianic prophecy as dating from the first intimation after the fall in Eden (... Genesis 3:15), and continuing in an intermittent but yet unbroken line from Genesis to Malachi.’

Zechariah sees the birth of his son and the birth of the Messiah as a fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham. The reference is particularly to that part of God’s promise: ‘all peoples on earth will be blessed

³⁸ Mark 14:61

³⁹ II Sam. 7:11-13

through you.⁴⁰ Mary had also mentioned Abraham in her son of praise. The Holy Spirit, who inspired both hymns, made sure that the line of promise, which began at the moment the first human couple was expelled from paradise, would be clearly marked in order to emphasize its fulfillment.

This emphasis makes clear that the enemy is not merely the Roman Empire under which yoke Israel was held at that time. Rome, as all imperialistic empires throughout world history, was a puppet of the archenemy, the serpent.

To be rescued from that enemy also means to be rescued from self. It is true that the enemy outside prevents us from living a holy life, but the main stumbling block in holy living is the enemy within us. As far as that is concerned we are our own worst enemies. The birth of the Messiah is the fulfillment of God's command and promise when He said to Israel: 'You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own,' and 'I the Lord am holy — I who make you holy.'⁴¹ It is the birth of Jesus Christ that allows and enables us 'to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.'

In the last verses of his hymn, 76-79, Zechariah addresses his eight-days-old son. His prophetic word would be John's guideline and the affirmation of his call as he grew up and came to the point of understanding. As Zechariah would be considered the last Old Testament prophet, so John the Baptist would be the first in the New Testament. Zechariah calls his son 'a prophet of the Most High.' The Hebrew word he used for God was probably *El-Elyon*. The first time that Name is used for God in Scripture is in connection with Melchizedek, who was called 'priest of God Most High.'⁴² Jesus would later say about John: 'I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist,'⁴³ making him the last Old Testament prophet.

John would see himself as the Lord's herald, saying, with a reference to Isaiah's prophecy: 'I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'⁴⁴ John would not preach a message of forgiveness, but of repentance as a prerequisite for forgiveness. The grace of God in forgiving sin would be revealed in the One whose coming John announced.

John would preach repentance, not forgiveness of sin. Forgiveness would be given by the One whose way John prepared. When Zechariah prophesies that God's people would acquire knowledge of salvation through forgiveness, he refers to the Messiah, not to John. The Greek word used is *aphesis*, meaning 'freedom,' or 'pardon.' Luke would later describe John's ministry with: 'He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the *forgiveness* of sins,'⁴⁵ using the same Greek word. Jesus also used it in His sermon in the synagogue of Nazareth, saying: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim *freedom* for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed ...'⁴⁶

Zechariah's prophecy states that we can know the forgiveness of our sins and experience this as salvation. When John would later point to Jesus and say: 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,'⁴⁷ he indicated how that knowledge of salvation would be realized. John's words contained a reference to the ceremony on the Day of Atonement, when the scapegoat was laden with the sins of the people and sent away to the desert. In the Old Testament ceremony two animals were needed to represent what Jesus did. We read in the law: 'Then [Aaron] is to take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. He is to cast lots for the two goats — one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat. Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the Lord and sacrifice it for a sin

⁴⁰ Gen. 12:3

⁴¹ Lev. 20:26; 21:8

⁴² Gen. 14:18

⁴³ Matt. 11:11

⁴⁴ John 1:23

⁴⁵ Luke 3:3

⁴⁶ Luke 4:18

⁴⁷ John 1:29

offering. But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.⁴⁸

The people, observing the ceremony in which the scapegoat was sent into the desert, could say: ‘There goes my sin!’ The author of Hebrews observes, however, that ‘the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.’⁴⁹ He continues: ‘The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!’⁵⁰ That is the knowledge of salvation Zechariah speaks about. It is not only awareness of cleansing, but also equipment to service.

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary asks the question: ‘Now what is this salvation which was prophesied of?’ and gives the following excellent comment on these verses: ‘First, It is a rescue from the malice of our enemies; it is *soterian ex echthron hemon*—a salvation out of our enemies, from among them, and out of the power of them that hate us (v. 71); it is a salvation from sin, and the dominion of Satan over us, both by corruptions within and temptations without. The carnal Jews expected to be delivered from under the Roman yoke, but intimation was betimes given that it should be a redemption of another nature. He shall save his people from their sins, that they may not have dominion over them, Matt 1:21.

Secondly, It is a restoration to the favor of God; it is to perform the mercy promised to our forefathers, v. 72. The Redeemer shall not only break the head of the serpent that was the author of our ruin, but he shall reinstate us in the mercy of God and reestablish us in his covenant; he shall bring us as it were into a paradise again, which was signified by the promises made to the patriarchs, and the holy covenant made with them, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, v. 73. Observe, 1. That which was promised to the fathers, and is performed to us, is mercy, pure mercy; nothing in it is owing to our merit (we deserve wrath and the curse), but all to the mercy of God, which designed us grace and life: *ex mero motu*—of his own good pleasure, he loved us because he would love us. 2. God herein had an eye to his covenant, his holy covenant, that covenant with Abraham: I will be a God to thee and thy seed. This his seed had really forfeited by their transgressions; this he seemed to have forgotten in the calamities brought upon them; but he will now remember it, will make it appear that he remembers it, for upon that are grounded all his returns of mercy: Lev 26:42, Then will I remember my covenant.

Thirdly, It is a qualification for, and an encouragement to, the service of God. Thus was the oath he swore to our Father Abraham, That he would give us power and grace to serve him, in an acceptable manner to him and a comfortable manner to ourselves, v.74,75. Here seems to be an allusion to the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, which, God tells Moses, was in pursuance of the covenant he made with Abraham (Ex 3:6-8), and that this was the design of his bringing them out of Egypt, that they might serve God upon this mountain, Ex 3:12. Note, The great design of gospel grace is not to discharge us from, but to engage us to, and encourage us in, the service of God. Under this notion Christianity was always to be looked upon, as intended to make us truly religious, to admit us into the service of God, to bind us to it, and to quicken us in it. We are therefore delivered from the iron yoke of sin, that our necks may be put under the sweet and easy yoke of the Lord Jesus. The very bonds which he has loosed do bind us faster unto him, Ps 116:16. We are hereby enabled, 1. To serve God without fear—*aphobos*. We are therefore put into a state of holy safety that we might serve God with a holy security and serenity of mind, as those that are quiet from the fears of evil. God must be served with a filial fear, a reverent obedient fear, an awakening quickening fear, but not with a slavish fear, like that of the slothful servant, who represented him to himself as a hard master, and unreasonable; not with that fear that has torment and amazement in it; not with the fear of a legal spirit; a spirit of bondage, but with the boldness of an evangelical spirit, a spirit of adoption. 2. To serve him in holiness and righteousness, which includes the whole duty of man towards God and our neighbor. It is both the intention and the direct tendency of the gospel to renew upon us that image of God in which man was at first made, which consisted in righteousness and true holiness, Ps 50:14. 3. To serve him, before him, in the duties of his immediate worship, wherein we present ourselves before the Lord, to serve him as those that have an eye always upon him, and see his eye always upon us, upon our inward

⁴⁸ Lev. 16:7-10

⁴⁹ Heb. 9:9

⁵⁰ Heb. 9:13,14

man, that is serving him before him. 4. To serve him all the days of our life. The design of the gospel is to engage us in constancy and perseverance in the service of God, by showing us how much depends upon our not drawing back, and by showing us how Christ loved us to the end, and thereby engaged us to love him to the end.’

Zechariah ends his hymn by comparing the birth of the Messiah to the sunrise of a new day. V.78 reads literally in Greek: ‘Through [the] tender mercy of our God; by which the dayspring from on high has visited us.’ The Greek word for ‘dayspring’ is *anatole*, which elsewhere in Scripture is rendered: ‘the east,’ meaning the direction from which the sun rises. *The New Living Translation* renders this: ‘Because of God’s tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us.’

Zechariah may have thought of Hosea’s prophecy in which the coming of Christ as well as His resurrection seems to be referred to. We read: ‘Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.’⁵¹ We may also think of Malachi, who prophesied: ‘But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.’⁵²

As *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states, ‘The entire passage contains echoes of the last chapter of Malachi’s prophecy.’

Luke ends this chapter by stating that John grew, both physically and spiritually, and that, at one point in his early life, he moved to the desert. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: ‘John’s upbringing is described very briefly. Many points in the later teaching of John remind us of similar points in the Dead Sea scrolls. Now there were in the wilderness Essenes who brought up other people’s and it is possible that John’s aged parents died or were not able to bring up their child themselves, so that he was brought up by some such sect. This is very hypothetical, but many things about John would be explained if he had in fact been brought up by some such desert sect but had broken away from it in adult life.’

G. The birth of Jesus 2:1-7

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

3 And everyone went to his own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,

7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on Luke’s opening statement: ‘There are difficulties posed by the facts that our knowledge of the times is imperfect and that what Luke says is not easy to fit in to what we do know. Thus there is no record of any law of Augustus that a universal census be held. But he did reorganize Roman administration, and there are records of censuses held in a number of places. In Egypt, where the custom is unlikely to have differed significantly from neighboring Syria (of which provinces Judea was part), a census was held every fourteen years. Actual documents survive for every census from AD 20 to 270 ... When Augustus died he left in his own handwriting a summary of information, such as statistics on direct and indirect taxation, which would most naturally have been derived from censuses. The evidence seems best satisfied if we understand the decree of which Luke writes, not as a formal law, but as an administrative direction which set the whole process in motion and had its effect in distant Judea.’

⁵¹ Hos. 6:1-3

⁵² Mal. 4:2

It was not, of course, necessary for Luke to mention the point (none of the other Evangelists does). But it seems to be part of his plan to set his story in the secular context (cf. 3:1). He sees God as Lord of history, and the actions of the emperor in faraway Rome do but set forward the divine plan and purpose.’

Luke has been accused by critics of being historically incorrect in mentioning that Quirinius was governor of Syria at the time of Jesus’ birth. Josephus mentions a census that took place in 6 AD. But, as *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: ‘None of the early opponents of Christianity, such as Celsus or Porphyry, impugn the accuracy of our evangelist here. Surely, if there had been so marked an error on the threshold of his Gospel, these distinguished adversaries of our faith, living comparatively soon after the events in question, would have been the first to hit so conspicuous a blot in the story they hated so well. And nothing is more improbable than that St. Luke, a man of education, and writing, too, evidently for people of thought and culture, would have ventured on a definite historical statement of this kind, which would, if wrong, have been so easily exposed, had he not previously thoroughly satisfied himself as to its complete accuracy.’ Assuming that Luke wrote his gospel some 50 years after the facts he mentions as historical, there is nor reason to suspect that he could not have been historically correct.

Caesar Augustus has been considered to be the first emperor of the Roman Empire. He reigned from 27 BC to AD 14. *Barnes’ Notes* states: ‘His first name was Octavianus. He was the nephew of Julius Caesar, and obtained the empire after his death. He took the name ‘Augustus - i.e., august,’ or honorable-as a compliment to his own greatness; and from him the month ‘August,’ which was before called ‘Sextilis,’ received its name.’

It is also interesting that Luke has been subjected to critical examinations of the facts he reports, while Josephus seems to be always above this kind of criticism.

Joseph, Mary’s fiancé, is recorded to be a member of the Davidic family. Some Bible scholars believe that his reason for having to report in Bethlehem may have been that he owned property there. No explanation is given for his move to Nazareth. Bethlehem may have been his birthplace.

The question has been asked why Mary had to accompany him, since, at this point, they were not married. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: ‘Perhaps Joseph did not care to leave her at Nazareth. She had been with Elizabeth for three months after her pregnancy began (1:56) and we have no way of knowing how much later the wedding took place. To have remained behind may have exposed her to calumny. Luke refers to Mary as *his betrothed*, perhaps because, though they were married (Matt. 1:24), the marriage was not yet consummated (Matt. 1:25).

It is doubtful that Mary’s presence in Bethlehem would have been required by the authorities of that time. But it is reasonable to assume that Joseph would not have wanted to leave his bride behind when he went to register, not knowing how long the process of registration would take. We may also assume that Joseph was familiar with Micah’s prophecy that stated: ‘But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.’⁵³ And, at this point, Joseph had full knowledge about the child Mary was bearing, that He would be the Messiah God had promised to His people.

When the Word became flesh, it was subjected to the decree of the Roman emperor. There was no manifestation of God’s strong arm as in the time when Israel was freed from Egyptian slavery. This is proof of the fact that Jesus’ kingdom was not of this world.⁵⁴ Christ’s reign is, first of all, a spiritual reign of truth and righteousness in the heart of people. Jesus did not come to take the place of Augustus or Herod.

From a human perspective it would be impossible for one monarch to submit to another. Augustus fought to become emperor. He conquered Marc Anthony to become Caesar. About 2000 fell victim before his was enthroned. During Augustus’ reign the tendency began to worship the emperor like a god.

It is no accident that Jesus was born at the time when a census was taken. God had told Moses that at every census of the people, the one who was counted had to pay ‘a ransom for his life at the time he is

⁵³ Mic. 5:2

⁵⁴ John 18:36

counted.’ The amount to be paid was a half shekel.⁵⁵ Augustus’ taking of a census was also for the purpose of collecting taxes. In the birth of Jesus Christ, God pays the ransom for the whole world.

Much can be debated about the date of December 25 at which Christmas is celebrated throughout the world. Some European tribes had been celebrating the return of the sun after the shortest day of the year, which marks the beginning of winter. There would be symbolic significance in equating the birth of Christ with the celebrations of the feast of the coming back of daylight that had been waning in Northern Europe. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: ‘The universal tradition of the Christian Church places the nativity in winter. The date ‘December 25’ was generally received by the Fathers of the Greek and Latin from the fourth century downwards.’ But it is impossibility to establish as fact that Jesus was born on Christmas Day.

We don’t know how long the couple had been in Bethlehem when the time came for Mary to deliver her baby. We get the picture of a town bustling with people who had come to Bethlehem for the required registration. All inns and hotels were filled with guests to the point that there had been no place for Joseph and Mary to stay. Jesus’ birth in a stable has been taken to symbolize His rejection by the world He came to save. It could be, however, that Joseph and Mary were staying inside some of the lodging places, but that it would not have been proper for her to birth her baby in a crowded place, maybe even in a room occupied by several families. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: ‘Joseph and Mary may have taken shelter in the stable. Tradition says that it was a cave in the side of the hill behind the inn.’

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the inn: ‘The inn of Bethlehem, what in modern Eastern travel is known as a *khan* or *caravanserai*, as distinct from a hostelry (the ‘inn’ of ... Luke 10:34). Such an inn or khan offered to the traveler simply the shelter of its walls and roofs. This khan of Bethlehem had a memorable history of its own, being named in ... Jeremiah 41:17 as the ‘inn of Chimham,’ the place of rendezvous from which travelers started on their journey to Egypt. It was so called after the son of Barzillai, whom David seems to have treated as an adopted son (2 Samuel 19: 37, 38), and was probably built by him in his patron’s city as a testimony of his gratitude’ ... The stable was not infrequently a limestone cave, and there is a very ancient tradition that there was a cave of this description attached to the ‘inn,’ or *caravanserai*, of Bethlehem. This ‘inn’ would, no doubt, be a large one, owing to its being in the neighborhood of Jerusalem, and would often be crowded with the poorer class of pilgrims who went up to the temple at the seasons of the greater feasts. Bethlehem is only six miles from Jerusalem.’

As Mary’s baby is born, Mary seems to have taken care of the delivery all by herself. We read: ‘She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger.’ *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a manger as: ‘A trough or open box for livestock feed or fodder.’ Mary evidently lived up to the reputation of Hebrew women in the time Israel was still enslaved in Egypt. The Egyptian midwives said about them: ‘Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.’⁵⁶ *Barnes’ Notes* observes about the fact that Mary wrapped baby Jesus in cloths: ‘When a child among the Hebrews was born, it was washed in water, rubbed in salt, and then wrapped in swaddling clothes; that is, not garments regularly made, as with us, but bands or blankets that confined the limbs closely, Ezek 16:4. There was nothing special in the manner in which the infant Jesus was treated.’

H. The angels and the shepherds 2:8-20

8 *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.*

9 *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

10 *But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*

11 *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*

12 *This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’*

⁵⁵ Ex. 30:11-16

⁵⁶ Ex. 1:19

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Without Luke’s report about the shepherds and the angels, we would have a much different Christmas celebration. They are the ones that demonstrate the glory of the event. What would the message of Christmas be without ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests’?

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes about shepherds in Israel: ‘It is not unlikely that shepherds were pasturing flocks destined for the temple sacrifices. Flocks were supposed to be kept only in the wilderness ... and a rabbinic rule provides that any animal found between Jerusalem and a spot near Bethlehem must be presumed to be a sacrificial victim ... The same rule speaks of finding Passover offerings within thirty days of that feast, i.e. in February. Since flocks might thus be in the fields in winter the traditional date for the birth of Jesus is not ruled out. Luke says nothing about the actual date and it remains quite unknown. As a class shepherds had a bad reputation. The nature of their calling kept them from observing the ceremonial law which meant so much to religious people. More regrettable was their unfortunate habit of confusing ‘mine’ with ‘thine’ as they moved about the country. They were considered unreliable and were not allowed to give testimony in the law-courts ... There is no reason for thinking that Luke’s shepherds were other than devout men, else why would God have given them such a privilege? But they did come from a despised class.’

It is noteworthy that, when Jesus was born as the savior of the world, none of the official authorities in Israel were informed about this greatest of all births. God sent His angel to tell a group of shepherds the good news. Shepherds may have been considered the lower class of society, but their profession was symbolic of the ministry Jesus Christ came to do. As we read in Hebrews: ‘May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, *that great Shepherd of the sheep*, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.’⁵⁷ It was logical that God invited a group of shepherds to meet the One who was their superior. He wanted them to understand that their work was similar to Christ’s, although on a different level. We think of David, the shepherd boy, who understood the symbolism of his work and wrote his most famous psalm: ‘The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.’⁵⁸

The Bible presents shepherding of sheep as an image of what Jesus does for the church. That is why Peter could write to church elders: ‘Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.’⁵⁹

Note the simplicity of the stable as opposed to the glory revealed in Ephrata. Whereas on earth a baby was born among cattle and sheep as the only witnesses, heaven was bursting to the seams with joy and exuberance to the point where the angelic host broke out to tell the news to some on earth.

⁵⁷ Heb. 13:20,21

⁵⁸ Ps. 23:1-3

⁵⁹ I Peter 5:2-4

Much has been said and speculated about the conditions of the shepherds and the sheep at the time the angels came down. There is in the traditional field of Ephrata a cave that may have been the place where the flocks were kept at night and where the shepherds kept watch by lying at the entrance.

All of a sudden the dark night was lit up by an angel, which caused the shepherds to be terrified. This is the third time in Luke's Gospel that the visit of an angel to people is reported, and in every instance the people's reaction was fear. As in the case of Zechariah and Mary, the angel begins his message with the words 'Do not be afraid.'⁶⁰

The angel tells the shepherds that he came to bring 'good news.' The Greek verb used is *euaggelizo*, from which the English word 'evangelize' is derived. The good news is the birth of a Savior, Christ, the Lord. The Apostle Paul calls the moment 'the fullness of time.'⁶¹ And to Timothy he wrote: 'And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.'⁶²

The angel says that the good news is meant 'for all the people,' speaking, first of all about Israel. The exclusive position of Israel in this world is solely based on the fact that the Savior of the world was born from them. The unique feature of our planet is that God became man on this earth, that He dwelt among us, and that the blood of an eternal covenant was shed on our soil. It is on our planet that the war between God and Satan was decided. God became a member of the human race in order to crush the head of the serpent. He has involved us in this cosmic struggle and in His victory over evil.

The content of the angel's message is that the baby born in Bethlehem is the Savior, the Christ and the Lord. Jesus would later explain, in His sermon in the synagogue of Nazareth with the anointing meant. He said: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'⁶³ This threefold title is, in a sense a job-description of what Jesus had come to do. As Savior He came to save the world from perdition; as Christ He brought the good news, the Gospel that would set people free and heal them, introducing the 'Year of Jubilee'; and as Lord He would be the King of kings. The shepherds would have understood this to mean that the baby was the Messiah.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary comments on the fact that the baby is called Christ. We read: 'Christos, the anointed, from chrio, to anoint, the same as mashiyach, from mashach. This name points out the Savior of the world in his prophetic, regal, and sacerdotal offices: as in ancient times, prophets, kings, and priests were anointed with oil, when installed into their respective offices. Anointing was the same with them as consecration is with us. Oil is still used in the consecration of kings.'

About the fact that the baby born is called 'the Lord,' *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* states: '[The Lord] Kurios, the supreme, eternal Being, the ruler of the heavens and the earth. The Septuagint generally translate Yahweh by Kurios. This Hebrew word, from haayaah, he was, properly points out the eternity and self-existence of the Supreme Being; and if we may rely on the authority of [a certain contemporary Bible scholar], which no scholar will call in question, Kurios, is a proper translation of Yahweh, as it comes from Kuro,-tungchanoo, I am, I exist. Others derive it from kuros, authority, legislative power. It is certain that the lordship of Christ must be considered in a mere spiritual sense, as he never set up any secular government upon earth, nor commanded any to be established in his name; and there is certainly no spiritual government but that of God: and indeed the word Lord, in the text, appears to be properly understood, when applied to the deity of Christ. Jesus is a prophet, to reveal the will of God, and instruct men in it. He is a priest, to offer up sacrifice, and make atonement for the sin of the world. He is Lord, to rule over and rule in the souls of the children of men: in a word, he is Jesus the Savior, to deliver from the power, guilt, and pollution of sin; to enlarge and vivify, by the influence of his Spirit; to preserve in the possession of the salvation which he has communicated; to seal those who believe, heirs of glory; and at last to receive them into the fullness of beatitude in his eternal joy.'

⁶⁰ Luke 1:13,30

⁶¹ Gal. 4:4

⁶² I Tim. 3:16 - NKJV

⁶³ Luke 4:18,19

What the shepherds would see as they arrived at the stable where Jesus was born, would be a little newborn child that would not look any different from any other newborn. The angel tells them that this will be ‘a sign,’ indicating that this would be the beginning of other events to follow. The only unusual thing the shepherds would see would be the crib in which the baby lay, which was nothing but a trough for the feeding of livestock. The fact that Jesus was laid in a manger would mean that He came to be ‘food for the whole world.’

The angel’s announcement is followed by a choir that sings the Hallelujah chorus: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’ The Greek text reads literally: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, toward men good will.’ The Greek word that has been subject to much controversy is *eudokia*, meaning ‘satisfaction,’ ‘delight,’ or ‘kindness.’ In several instances in which the Apostle Paul uses the word it is rendered ‘pleasure.’⁶⁴

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states about this: ‘There are problems of both text and translation in the expression rendered *among men with whom he is pleased* (more literally ‘among men of (his) good pleasure’). But RSV is right over against ‘peace, good will toward men’ (AV), a reading supported by many late MSS. The angels are saying that God will bring peace ‘for men on whom his favor rests’ (NEB). There is an emphasis on God, not man. It is those whom God chooses, rather than those who choose God, of whom the angel speaks.’

It is usually assumed that the large army of angels that appeared after the first angel had delivered his message sang the words of the text. Although the Greek uses the word *legotoon*, for ‘saying,’ the words were probably set to music. The text of the doxology is short but glorious. ‘Glory to God in the highest’ may be interpreted to mean that God receives praise in heaven. It could also mean that the highest praise is due to God.

It is the choir of angels that sings its praises to God for the event of Christ’s birth that had just occurred. Although angels are not beneficiaries of the salvation Jesus Christ came to bring, and though they had never experienced the horror and anguish of sin, they rejoiced in the fact that it would be made available to mankind that was lost in sin. In His parables about saving what it lost, Jesus would later say: ‘I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.’

Speaking about the Old Testament prophets, the Apostle Peter would later write: ‘It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.’⁶⁵

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the appearance of the angelic host: ‘The troop of angels issues forth from the depths of that invisible world which surrounds us on every side’ ... One of the glorious titles by which the eternal King was known among the chosen people was ‘Lord of sabaoth,’ equivalent to ‘Lord of hosts.’ In several passages of the Scriptures is the enormous multitude of these heavenly beings noticed; for instance, ... Psalm 68:17, where the Hebrew is much more expressive than the English rendering; ... Daniel 7:10, ‘Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.’ ‘And with him ten thousand times ten thousand holy angels;’ and ‘The crown of the Law is his [Moses], because he brought it from the heavens above, when there was revealed to him the glory of the Lord’s Shekinah, with two thousand myriads of angels, and forty and two thousand chariots of fire,’ etc.).’

The ‘peace on earth’ the angelic host proclaims is, first of all, peace for people who have a relationship with God. It is the peace that reigns in the heart of those who have surrendered. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s command in paradise, they actually declared war on God. They sided with the enemy who had risen up in rebellion against God’s authority. Although God had not declared this war, He is the One who sends His angels with a message, offering peace. The Apostle Paul would later write to the church in Rome: ‘Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.’ This peace settlement would come at a very high price, the death of the Son of God.

⁶⁴ Eph. 1:5,9; II Thes. 2:11

⁶⁵ I Peter 1:12

Eventually, the peace that will reign in people's heart, will bring about peace for all of creation, where, in Isaiah's words: 'The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.'⁶⁶

When the music dies down, the host of angels disappears, leaving the shepherd in the darkness of the world. It probably took a little while for them to recover from the experience. Then they decide to go to Bethlehem and see the baby for themselves. Luke does not comment on the fact that they leave the flock behind without supervision or protection. Neither does he tell us how the shepherd knew what inn to go to. The shepherds must have believed that since the Lord told them to go, He would take care of the rest.

There is also no account of the conversation between the shepherds and Mary and Joseph. We only read that they found them and saw the newborn baby, exactly as they had been told. They must have told the young couple why they came and how they had been told.

Joseph and Mary may have been wondering how it could be that the Messiah would be born in a stable. They both had had their own encounters with angels, but they could hardly have expected that God, so to speak, could not find a decent place for His Son to be born. Doubt may have come up as their experience of rejection came upon them. The report of the shepherds changed all this. Heaven came down for them also and glory filled their soul.

Going back to their flock of sheep the shepherd told everyone they met on the road what they had seen. By that time the sun had probably come up and they found their way back in daylight. Soon all of Bethlehem knew what had happened. We do not read, however, that any of Bethlehem's citizens bothered to find the place and pay a visit to Mary and Joseph.

Luke describes Mary's reaction with one of the most beautiful phrases in his whole Gospel: 'But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.' The Greek text of v.19 reads literally: 'But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.'

The Greek word, rendered 'kept,' is *suntereo*, meaning 'to keep closely together,' 'to conserve,' or 'to remember.' We find the same verb used in the verse: 'Herod feared John and *protected* him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.'⁶⁷ Mary needed to hold on to these words as later, in Simeon's words, a sword would pierce her own soul.

Barnes' Notes comments: 'Here is a delicate and beautiful expression of the feelings of a mother. A 'mother' forgets none of those things which occur respecting her children. Everything they do or suffer-everything that is said of them, is treasured up in her mind; and often she thinks of those things, and anxiously seeks what they may indicate respecting the future character and welfare of her child.'

The Pulpit Commentary comments beautifully: 'Such a note as this could only have been made by Mary herself. *She* knew her Child was in some mysterious sense the Son of God. A glorious being not of earth had told her that her Boy would be the Savior of Israel. The visit of the rough shepherds to her in the crowded caravanserai, and their strange but quiet and circumstantial story of the angel's visit to them, was only another link in the wondrous chain of events which was day by day influencing her young pure life. She could not as yet grasp it all, perhaps she never did in its mighty gracious fullness; but, as at the first, when Gabriel the angel spoke to her, so at each new phase of her life, she bowed herself in quiet trustful faith, and waited and thought, writing down, we dare to believe, the record of all that was passing, and this record, we think, she showed to Luke or Paul.'

Meanwhile the shepherd kept on singing the Hallelujah chorus they had hear the angels sing.

⁶⁶ Isa. 11:6-9

⁶⁷ Mark 6:20

I. The baby Jesus 2:21-40

1. The circumcision 2:21

21 *On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.*

Circumcision is first mentioned in Scripture in connection with Abraham. God told Abraham: ‘For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner — those who are not your offspring.’⁶⁸ Evidently, the practice was incorporated in the Mosaic law, although it is nowhere specifically mentioned there. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: ‘These ancient rites —circumcision and purification — enjoined in the Mosaic Law were intended as perpetual witnesses to the deadly taint of imperfection and sin inherited by every child of man. In the cases of Mary and her Child these rites were not necessary; but the mother devoutly submitted herself and her Babe to the ancient customs, willingly obedient to that Divine Law under which she was born and hitherto had lived.’

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments about this: ‘Circumcision was a symbolical and bloody removal of the body of sin (Col 2:11,13; cf. Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; Rom 2:29). But as if to proclaim, in the very act of performing this rite, that there was no body of sin to be removed in His case, but rather that He was the destined Remover of it from others, the name JESUS, in obedience to express command from heaven, was given Him at His circumcision, and given Him ‘because,’ as said the angel, ‘He shall save His people from their sins’ (Matt 1:21). So significant was this, that His circumciser, had he been fully aware of what he was doing, might have said to Him, as John afterward did, ‘I have need to be circumcised of Thee, and comest Thou to me?’ and the answer, in this case as in that, would doubtless have been, ‘Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness’ (Matt 3:14-15). Still, the circumcision of Christ had a profound bearing on His own work. For since he that is ‘circumcised is a debtor to do the whole law’ (Gal 5:3), the circumcised Savior thus bore about with Him, in His very flesh, the seal of a voluntary obligation to do the whole law-by Him only possible in the flesh, since the fall. But further, as it was only to ‘redeem (from its curse) them that were under the law,’ that He submitted at all to be ‘made under the law’ (Gal 4:4-5; 3:13), the obedience to which Jesus was bound over was purely a redeeming obedience, or the obedience of a ‘Savior.’ Once more, as it was only by being made a curse for us that Christ could redeem us from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13), the circumcision of Christ is to be regarded as a virtual pledge to die; a pledge not only to yield obedience in general, but to be ‘obedient unto death, even the death of the cross’ (Phil 2:8).’

The eighth day, the day of circumcision, was also the day on which the name was given. Joseph and Mary obeyed the word the angel Gabriel had given and they named Him Jesus. The Hebrew form of the name would be Yehoshuah, meaning: ‘Yahweh is deliverance.’

2. The presentation in the temple 2:22-24

22 *When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord*

23 *(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’),*

24 *and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: ‘a pair of doves or two young pigeons.’*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes the following about the rite of purification: ‘Two quite separate ceremonies are involved here, the presentation of the child and the purification of the mother. The attendance of the child was not necessary, but it was natural when they were all so close to Jerusalem. The presentation of the baby follows from the fact that *every male that opens the womb* (i.e. the first-born of a mother, not necessarily of the father) *shall be called holy to the Lord* (Luke’s is not exact but gives the sense of several passages: Exod. 13:2, 12, 15; Num. 18:15). Though Luke does not mention it, doubtless the usual five shekels were paid to redeem the first-born (Num. 18:15f).

⁶⁸ Gen. 17:12

Levitical law provided that after the birth of a son a woman would be unclean for seven days and that for a further thirty-three days she should keep away from all holy things (for a daughter the times were doubled; Lev. 12:1-5). Then she should offer a lamb and a dove or pigeon. If she was too poor for a lamb a second dove or pigeon sufficed instead (Lev. 12:6-13). Mary's offering was thus that of the poor. The reference to *their* purification is strange. Some think Jesus is included, but it seems more likely that *their* refers to the same people as the following *they*, i.e. Joseph and Mary. If Mary was ceremonially unclean it was almost a certainty that Joseph would contract defilement and they would both need cleansing.'

In a way, Jesus' submission to the Levitical law at this point, even though it was the obedience of the mother and the stepfather in this case, was part of the humiliation to which the Son of God submitted Himself. In the same way as Jesus would later say to John, at the moment of His baptism: 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.'⁶⁹ Also the fact that, as Leon Morris mentions, the sacrifice brought was that of people who were too poor to pay for a lamb, is a demonstration of t. The Apostle Paul would later write: 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.'

3. The song of Simeon 2:25-32

25 *Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.*

26 *It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.*

27 *Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,*

28 *Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:*

29 *'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.*

30 *For my eyes have seen your salvation,*

31 *which you have prepared in the sight of all people,*

32 *a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'*

Although much speculation about the identity of Simeon has been voiced, the Bible gives us no clue as to who he was and what his position was in Jewish society. Luke introduces the story with the Greek word *idou*, 'look,' which gives vividness to the text. He mentions four characteristics about this man: he was righteous, devout, expecting the Messiah and filled with the Holy Spirit. The Greek adjectives used are *dikaios*, 'righteous,' or 'holy,' and *eulabes*, 'devout.'

Simeon expected the Messiah to be born during his lifetime. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, a Jewish 'prayer for the advent of Messiah was in daily use.' The coming of the Messiah is beautifully called 'the consolation of Israel.' Simeon's expectation was confirmed to him by the Holy Spirit.

Simeon's daily life was evidently lived in intimate fellowship with God. He must have presented himself to the Lord on a daily basis, asking what God wanted him to do every day of his life. So it happened that one day the Holy Spirit told him to go to the temple because the Messiah would be there.

When Solomon dedicated the first temple in Jerusalem, which was destroyed by the Babylonians, we read: 'When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.'⁷⁰ No such manifestation occurred when baby Jesus was brought into the temple, but in a more real sense, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD when He was brought in by His parents.

When Joseph and Mary entered, Simeon knew immediately who their baby was. We read that he took Him in his arms, and sang a doxology.

⁶⁹ Matt. 3:15

⁷⁰ I Kings 8:10,11

The Pulpit Commentary comments: ‘The beautiful little hymn of Simeon was no doubt preserved by the Virgin Mary and given to St. Luke. The *Nunc dimittis* has been used constantly in the liturgies of Christian Churches for fourteen centuries. The thought which runs through the hymn has been well put by [a certain Bible scholar]: ‘Simeon represents himself under the image of a sentinel, whom his master has placed in an elevated position, and charged to look for the appearance of a star, and then to announce it to the world. He sees this long-desired star; he proclaims its rising, and asks to be relieved of the post on the watch-tower he has occupied so long.’

Simeon called upon God as ‘sovereign Lord.’ We don’t know what Hebrew word Simeon used; it may have been El-Shadday, ‘God Almighty.’ Luke translates the name with the Greek word *despotes*, ‘absolute ruler.’

Looking at the poetic utterance of Simeon, we can hardly imagine that he simply spoke these words; he must have sung, or at least, chanted them. Here again, the Holy Spirit who was in this man, used poetry to express the beauty of the birth of the Messiah.

Simeon was probably an old man at this time. He seems to have expected death, but not before God’s promise that he would see the Messiah was fulfilled. The words ‘you now dismiss your servant in peace,’ evidently refer to his departure for heaven.

The Greek word, rendered ‘dismiss,’ is *apoloio*, which literally means ‘to free fully.’ The word is used for divorce of married people, but also for the freeing of a prisoner, as in the verse: ‘Then he *released* Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.’⁷¹ It is as if Simeon felt he was trapped in a body and was eager to be released. But the words ‘dismiss your servant’ also remind us of the law on Hebrew servants, who had the right to be let go after seven years of service.⁷²

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: ‘Simeon’s *now* is important. He is ready to die peacefully *now* that he has seen God’s *salvation*, i.e. the Baby through whom God would in time bring salvation. His language is that used of the freeing of a slave and he may be thinking of death as ‘his release from a long task’ ... Simeon goes on to show that this salvation is not for any one nation but for all. This is clear enough in *all peoples*, but Simeon spells it out by speaking of both *the Gentiles* and *thy people Israel*. It is probably on the poetic structure that links *a light for revelation* with the former and *glory* with the latter, for he would bring revelation to Israel as to others. But there is appropriateness in linking *glory* with Israel. There is much about glory in the Old Testament, particularly in connection with God’s manifestations of himself to his people. But Israel will see glory in its truest and fullest sense when it sees the Son of God (cf. John 1:14). His being a light to Gentiles means no diminution of Israel’s glory, but rather its full realization.’

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on the words ‘my eyes have seen your salvation’: ‘How many saw this Child, nay the full-grown ‘Man, Christ Jesus,’ who never saw in Him ‘God’s Salvation!’ This estimate of Simeon’s was an act of pure faith. While gazing upon that infant, borne in his own arms, he ‘beheld His glory.’ In another view it was prior faith rewarded by present sight.’

For Mary and Joseph Simeon’s chant was another confirmation of the truth of God’s revelation to both of them, that their baby would be the Savior of the world.

4. Simeon’s prophecy 2:33-35

33 *The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.*

34 *Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,*

35 *so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’*

Interestingly, Joseph is here called ‘the child’s father.’ He was considered to be Joseph’s son by adoption. The same concept was held against Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah, when He preached in the synagogue of Nazareth and the people responded by saying: ‘Isn’t this Joseph’s son?’⁷³

⁷¹ Matt. 27:26

⁷² Ex. 21:2

⁷³ Luke 4:22

Simeon blesses both of them, but then turns to Mary to pronounce a prophecy about mother and baby.

Then Simeon pronounces a prophecy regarding the role Jesus Christ would play in Israel and how this would affect Mary. The Greek text of v.34 reads literally: ‘Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against.’ The Greek word, rendered ‘fall,’ is *ptosis*, meaning ‘a downfall.’ The word is used in the verse that concludes Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount: ‘The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it *fell* with a great crash.’⁷⁴ ‘Rising again’ is the translation of the Greek verb *anastasis*, which can describe ‘a resurrection from death.’ The same word is used in Jesus’ conversation with the Sadducees about the resurrection.⁷⁵ It is remarkable that Simeon does not say that Jesus will cause the fall and resurrection of all Israel, but ‘of many in Israel.’ That must mean that some people will experience individually their fall, that is, they will realize being lost and that Jesus’ atonement for their sins, and will undergo a resurrection by putting their faith in Christ. Those, who do not accept Christ’s death as a ransom for their lives, will resist. They will speak against Him. Jesus’ death and resurrection will bring about a cleansing of the soul, which the author of Hebrews describes as the function of the Word of God in a human heart. We read: ‘For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.’⁷⁶

We can understand how the horrible death of her Son must have affected Mary emotionally. That is partly what Simeon refers to in his last remark. But the fact that it is ‘a sword’ makes it God’s Word that causes the hurt as well as the healing.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about Simeon’s prophecy: ‘It is not certain whether Simeon has in mind one group of people or two. If one, he is saying that, unless people lose all pride in their own spiritual achievement there is no place for them. They must fall and take the lowly place; then they can rise (cf. Mic. 7:8; cf. also the publican in the parable, 18:9-14). If two, he means that Jesus will divide people: those who reject him will in the *end fall* (cf. Isa.8:14f.) and those who accept him will rise, they will enter into salvation. Not surprisingly, he will be *spoken against*. That he will also be *a sign* is not so obvious. The expression means that he will point to the action of God. Simeon goes on to the cost to Mary. The *sword* (*rhomphaia* denotes a large sword, not the small *machaira* of 22:36, 38, 49, 52) that will pierce Mary’s soul in the death of Jesus. His suffering will not leave her untouched. Simeon’s final words point to the revelatory function of Jesus’ work. People declare themselves by their attitude to him. We cannot ultimately be neutral. When people see Christ suffer, their reaction shows on which side they stand.’

5. Anna’s thanksgiving 2:36-38

36 *There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,*

37 *and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.*

38 *Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

Anna is said to be a member of the tribe of Asher. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states that Asher was: ‘one of the ten tribes, of whom many were not carried captive, and not a few, particularly of this very tribe, re-united themselves to Judah after the return from Babylon (2 Chron 30:11). The distinction of tribes, though practically destroyed by the captivity, was well enough known up to their final dispersion (Rom 11:1; Heb 7:14); nor even now is it entirely lost.’

There is some confusion about Anna’s age. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: ‘Anna had lived with a husband seven years before his death. If she was married at the age of twelve, she must now have been over one hundred years of age, unless Luke intended eighty-four years to comprise her total age.’

⁷⁴ Matt. 7:27

⁷⁵ Matt. 22:23-32

⁷⁶ Heb. 4:12

About the fact that Anna is called ‘a prophetess’ *Barnes’ Notes* observes: ‘Why Anna was called a prophetess is not known. It might be because she had been the wife of a prophet, or because she was employed in celebrating the praises of God (compare 1 Chron 25:1-2,4; 1 Sam 10:5), or because she herself had foretold future events, being inspired.’

The fact that she recognized the Messiah in the baby that was taken into the temple, suggests that she had the gift of prophecy, being able to discern the real meaning of the moment. When Luke states that she ‘spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem,’ she must have exercised her prophetic gift.

6. The return to Nazareth 2:39-40

39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

Luke does not mention the visit of the magi, the massacre of the infants of Bethlehem nor the flight to Egypt. He makes it sound as if Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth immediately after the presentation of Jesus at the temple. We read the record of the flight to Egypt in Matthew’s Gospel. And the return to Nazareth of the couple did not take place until the death of Herod. We read: ‘After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.’ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: ‘He will be called a Nazarene.’⁷⁷

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary suggests: ‘It is very likely, that as soon as the presentation in the temple, and the ceremonies relative to it, had been accomplished, that the holy family did return to Galilee, as Luke here states, and that they continued there till Herod’s bloody purpose was discovered to them by the Lord; which probably took some time to bring it to its murderous crisis, after the departure of the magi. After which, they fled into Egypt, where they continued till the death of Herod; and it is probable that it is of a second return to Nazareth that Matthew speaks, Matt 2:23.’

As *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes, ‘Luke is the sole source of information about Jesus’ childhood. All sorts of fanciful legends about our Lord’s youth were written and published in the apocryphal Gospels, but none of them appear in the Scriptures.’

As a true physician, Luke describes the physical, mental and spiritual development of Jesus from a baby into a youth. ‘And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.’

J. The boy Jesus in the temple 2:41-52

41 Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.

42 When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom.

43 After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.

44 Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.

45 When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

⁷⁷ Matt. 2:19-23

47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.’

49 ‘Why were you searching for me?’ he asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’

50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

According to the law, every male Israelite had to appear before the Lord three times a year. We read in Exodus: ‘Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me. Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt. No one is to appear before me empty-handed. Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field. Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord.’⁷⁸ Somehow that command was not kept literally anymore at the time of Jesus’ birth. The Babylonian captivity and subsequent dispersion made it difficult to comply.

Joseph and Mary may have followed the custom of their day by traveling to Jerusalem once a year to celebrate Passover. Jesus must have been entrusted to relatives during his early years, for we only read that He accompanied His parents as He turned twelve.

The Pulpit Commentary states: ‘When a Jewish boy was three years old he was given the tasseled garment directed by the Law (... Numbers 15:38-41; ... Deuteronomy 22:12). At five he usually began to learn portions of the Law, under his mother’s direction; these were passages written on scrolls, such as the shema or creed of ... Deuteronomy 6:4, the Hallel Psalms (Psalm 114, 118, 136). When the boy was thirteen years old he wore, for the first time, the phylacteries, which the Jew always put on at the recital of the daily prayer. In the well-known and most ancient ‘Maxims of the Fathers’ ... we read that, at the age of ten, a boy was to commence the study of the Mishna (the Mishna was a compilation of traditional interpretations of the Law); at eighteen he was to be instructed in the Gemara (the Gemara was a vast collection of interpretations of the Mishna. The Mishna and Gemara together make up the Talmud. The Mishna may roughly be termed the text, the Gemara the commentary, of the Talmud).’

In His early years Jesus must have learned His ‘catechism’ in the synagogue of Nazareth. But, evidently He had never been taken back to the temple in Jerusalem since His initial presentation as a baby.

In Jewish culture the age of thirteen was the critical one for a boy. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: ‘It was at thirteen years of age that a Jewish boy could become a ‘son of the commandment’ or full member of the synagogue ... He would then assume all the responsibilities implied in his circumcision. For some observances at any rate the Mishnah provides that a boy should be taken to the observance a year or two before he turned thirteen so that he might be prepared ... and there may have been something of this on the present occasion (though it is equally possible that Jesus went up every year; we do not know). On this occasion Jesus was left behind when his parents set out for home. In a large ‘caravan’ ... parents might well not know where a child was. If the later practice was followed, the women and small children went ahead and the men followed with the bigger boys. Joseph and Mary may each have thought that Jesus was with the other. For a full day they journeyed, looking for him among the travelers before they concluded he must still be in Jerusalem and so returned hither. The description of Jesus as *the boy, pais*, may be in intentional contrast with ‘baby,’ *brephos*, and ‘little boy,’ *paidion*, in verses 16, 40. There is a record of development.’

It was probably in the evening, when the family would stop for the night and sleep together that Joseph and Mary became seriously concerned when their boy Jesus did not show up. ‘After three days’ probably simply means on the third day after they had left Jerusalem. They had traveled for one day, which means that it would take one day traveling back and the third day was the day they found him. Luke does not

⁷⁸ Ex. 23:14-17

follow the Jewish calendar in which the day begins and ends as 6 PM. A Jew would call the time from 5:55 PM – 6:05 PM ‘two days.’

Mary and Joseph’s anxiety was a normal emotional reaction any parent would have at the disappearance of a child. They went through two days of worry, aggravated by the knowledge that their child was God’s Son who had been entrusted to their care. Mary may have thought that Jesus’ disappearance was the sword, piercing her heart, that Simeon had spoken about.

When they found their boy, Jesus was sitting in one of the temple courts in a circle of teachers of the law, listening and asking questions and answering theirs. One Bible scholar entitles the scene as ‘A Savior lost and found.’ *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: ‘In the temple enclosure, says the Talmud, there were three synagogues — one at the gate of the court of the Gentiles, another at the entrance of the court of the Israelites, a third in the south-east part of the inner court: it was in these that the rabbis expounded the Law.’

The picture becomes more vivid if we look at it in the light of Jesus’ normal development as a human being. In the Incarnation, ‘the Word became flesh,’ the Second Person of the Trinity became a human being. In describing the process, the Apostle Paul states that Jesus ‘did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing,’⁷⁹ using the Greek verb *ekénoosen*, ‘to make empty.’ We believe that this means that, in becoming man, Jesus laid aside the use of all His divine attributes. As a human being, living on earth, He was not omnipotent, omniscient or omnipresent. If He had been omnipotent and omniscient, He ought to have been omnipresent too. And we know He wasn’t. It was not until after His resurrection that He could say: ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’⁸⁰

Generally speaking, His human development from a newborn baby into a child, a teenager and an adult was the same as the development of every human being. His brain developed; He had to learn to walk and to speak. He grew physically, emotionally and spiritually. He must have gradually become aware of His calling as the Messiah. At one point, during this development, His mother must have told Him about the message of the angel Gabriel. In playing with other children, He must have noticed a difference in that He found no tendency to sin in Himself, as He saw His peers would be sinning.

Apart from the input He received from His parents, He discovered who He was in the Old Testament Scriptures. In the synagogue He must have learned about Moses’ prophecy: ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. The Lord said to me: ‘... I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.’⁸¹ From the Psalms He learned: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, ‘Here I am, I have come — it is written about me in the scroll.’⁸² And: ‘The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’⁸³

Being without a sinful nature, He possessed a human mind that we would qualify, in human terms, as ‘brilliant.’ From His answers to the devil during His forty-day long temptation, we gather that He had memorized the whole book of Deuteronomy.

In staying behind in the temple and listening to the doctors of the law, asking and answering questions, this brilliant almost-teenager wanted nothing more than entering deeper into the written Word of God. He was deeply aware, as He would tell Satan later, that: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’⁸⁴ When His parents found Him that was what He was doing.

Mary said to Jesus: ‘How could you do this to us?’ In answering, Jesus demonstrated that there were some things, common to all sinful human beings, that would remain foreign to Him all through His life. He

⁷⁹ Phil. 2:6,7

⁸⁰ Matt. 28:18

⁸¹ Deut. 18:15,17,18

⁸² Ps. 40:6,7

⁸³ Ps. 110:1

⁸⁴ Matt. 4:4

never knew any anxiety, apart from what He went through in Gethsemane. He also never doubted the Father, as most of us do regularly. We read that, in Nazareth, He ‘was amazed at their lack of faith.’⁸⁵ During the storm on the lake, He said to His disciples: ‘You of little faith, why are you so afraid?’⁸⁶

The Greek text of v.48 reads literally: ‘Son, why have you thus dealt with us? Behold your father and I have sought you sorrowing.’ *The New Living Translation* renders this: “‘Son,’ his mother said to him, ‘why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere.’”

Jesus’ answer, apart from containing a slight correction of Mary’s reference to His ‘father,’ reveals clearly that young Jesus knew who He was and what His mission on earth would be.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: ‘For Jesus it was a matter of surprise that there should have been any difficulty. The natural place for him to be was *in my Father’s house* (Jesus’ first words in this Gospel). The Greek could be rendered ‘about my Father’s business’ (AV). But RSV is probably right, for the Father’s business could be done in many places, and his parents’ problem was where he was, not what he was doing. His answer shows that thus early Jesus had a clear idea of the importance of the service of God and probably also that he stood in a special relationship to God. The expression *my Father* is noteworthy and no parallel appears to be cited (the Jews added ‘in heaven’ or used ‘our Father’ or the like). The first recorded words of the Messiah are then a recognition of his unique relationship to God and of the necessity (must) of his being in the Father’s house. There is a Jewish midrash which speaks of the Messiah as knowing God directly, without human assistance, a distinction shared only by Abraham, Job and Hezekiah ... But Luke is saying more than this. Jesus had a relationship to God shared by no other. Joseph and Mary did not understand this. They learnt what Jesus’ Messiahship meant bit by bit.’

Besides showing that He had a personal and intimate relationship with God, the Father, Jesus’ answer to His parents also tells us something about the temple. Although this building had never been filled with the glory of the Lord as the tabernacle and the first temple had been, Jesus believed that the Spirit of the Father was present in that place in a way He was nowhere else. Later, toward the end of His earthly ministry, He would scold the Pharisees and teachers of the law, about the way they treated the temple. We read: ‘You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it.’⁸⁷

The Pulpit Commentary comments: ‘This recital of the temple scene, the meeting with the great rabbis there, the few words of surprise addressed by the Boy to Mary and Joseph when they sought him ‘sorrowing’ — ‘as if it were possible,’ to use [one Bible scholar’s] expression, for ‘him to be in wrong or in danger’ — this recital alone breaks the deep silence which shrouds the first thirty years of ‘the Life.’ For some eighteen years after that visit to Jerusalem Jesus appears to have lived and toiled as a carpenter at Nazareth, with Joseph and Mary while they both lived, with Mary and his half-sister’s and brothers when Joseph was dead. Justin Martyr, living a century and a half later, speaks of the ploughs and yokes the Master’s own hands had fashioned during first long quiet pause in his life. Why, it is often asked, were not these years spent in Jerusalem and in the temple neighborhood, in the center of busy life and active Jewish thought? [one Bible scholar] suggests an answer which, if not exhaustive, is at least satisfactory: ‘If the spiritual atmosphere of Nazareth was heavy, it was at least calm; and the labors of the workshop, in the retirement of this peaceful valley, under the eye of the Father, was a more favorable sphere for the development of Jesus than the ritualism of the temple and the rabbinical discussions of Jerusalem.’ Joseph is never again mentioned in the gospel story; the probability is that he died some time in that period of eighteen years. *But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.* As twelve years before, Mary — pondering in her heart — had treasured up the rough adoration of the shepherds and their strange story of what the angels said to them about her Child (ver. 19), as doubtless she had done too when the Magi laid their costly gifts before the Babe at Bethlehem, and when Simeon and Anna in the temple spoke their prophetic utterances over the Infant; so now the mother, in quiet humble faith, stored up again her Son’s

⁸⁵ Mark 6:6

⁸⁶ Matt. 8:26

⁸⁷ Matt. 23:18-21

sayings in her heart, waiting with brave and constant patience for the hour when her God should grant her to see face to face the mysterious things she had hitherto seen only ‘in a glass darkly.’”

Luke tells us that Jesus returned with His parents to Nazareth, that He was obedient to them and continued to grow physically, mentally and spiritually. The words ‘in favor with God and men,’ refer to *The Book of Proverbs*, where a father admonishes his son: ‘My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.’⁸⁸

2. The ministry of John the Baptist 3:1-20

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar — when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—

2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.

3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

4 As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: ‘A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

5 Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.

6 And all mankind will see God’s salvation.’”

7 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

9 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.’

10 ‘What should we do then?’ the crowd asked.

11 John answered, ‘The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.’

12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized. ‘Teacher,’ they asked, ‘what should we do?’

13 ‘Don’t collect any more than you are required to,’ he told them.

14 Then some soldiers asked him, ‘And what should we do?’ He replied, ‘Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely — be content with your pay.’

15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.

16 John answered them all, ‘I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’

18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.

⁸⁸ Prov. 3:1-4

19 But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done,

20 Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on Luke's efforts to place John's ministry historically in the context of that time: 'Luke's elaborate dating is set at the beginning of John's ministry (not that of Jesus). It thus reflects the critical importance of the revival of prophecy. And it sets what follows firmly in the context of secular history. As Augustus died on 19 August AD 14, *the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar* was August AD 28 – August 29. Some argue that the starting-point should be that of Tiberius' co-regentship with Augustus, AD 11-12; but no example appears to be cited of anyone ever dating from this point. Dates are always from the time Tiberius became emperor. Others hold that Luke is using the Syrian method whereby the year began on 1 October. The period 19 August – 30 September would be counted as the first year of the reign, with the second beginning on 1 October. This brings us to the year beginning on 1 October AD 27. If he followed a similar Jewish system the year would be that beginning Nisan 1 (March – April) AD 28. It does not seem that we can get closer than about AD 27-29.

Pontius Pilate was governor. This word is quite general, but an inscription shows that his title was 'perfect' (not 'procurator,' as has often been held). *Judea* was part of the region assigned by Herod the Great to Archelaus, but he ruled so badly that his subjects petitioned the Romans to remove him. They did so and installed their own governor in AD 6. Pilate held this office AD 26-36. *Herod* is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. He became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea on his father's death in 4 BC and held office until AD 39. He thus ruled during most of Jesus' lifetime over the territory in which most of Jesus' time was spent ...

Luke adds a dating of peculiar importance to Jews, namely with reference to *the high priesthood*. *Annas* was high priest AD 6-15, when the Roman governor Gratus deposed him. Five of his sons became high priest in due course, and *Caiaphas*, who held the office AD 18-36, was his son-in-law. Luke uses the singular, which shows that he knew there was only one high priest. He appears to mean that Caiaphas was actually in office, but that Annas still exercised great influence, perhaps was even regarded by many Jews as the true high priest ... It may be worth pointing out that when Jesus was arrested he was first brought to Annas (John 18:4).

At the time so impressively marked out *the word of God came to John*. The expression is very like that used in LXX of the way the prophets got their message (cf. Jer. 1:2). It is probably meant to place John in the true prophetic succession.'

Luke had already mentioned John's dwelling place as being in the desert, even before he entered upon his public ministry.⁸⁹ Evidently, before he began to preach, John had spent several years as a hermit in seclusion and loneliness. The fact that John's ministry became so popular and effective defies all logic. It has been said: 'If a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mouse-trap, than his neighbor, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door.'⁹⁰ The world did beat a path to John's door in the desert of Judah! John had something the hungry masses knew they needed.

The Pulpit Commentary states: 'The reputation of John probably preceded the Divine summons. His family — the son of a well-known priestly family — the marvelous circumstances attendant on his birth, his ascetic manner of life from the beginning, — all this had contributed to make him a marked personage; so, when he left his solitude, we read in the other evangelists how multitudes came forth to hear the strange burning words, the Divine eloquence of one long looked upon by the people as set apart for a great work. He seems to have principally preached and taught in the Jordan valley — no doubt for the convenience of his candidates for baptism. But he evidently did not confine his preaching to one spot or even to one neighborhood. The district here alluded to was about a hundred and fifty miles in length. The expectation of Messiah for centuries had been the root of all true life in Israel; gradually, as the clouds of evil fortune gathered thick over the people, the figure of the coming Messiah assumed a different aspect.'

⁸⁹ Luke 1:80

⁹⁰ Attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The other evangelists all inserted a reference from Isaiah’s prophecy about the coming of the Messiah, although not in its complete form as Luke does here. John’s Gospel put the quotation in the form of an answer John the Baptist gave to some who inquired about his ministry: ‘John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’’⁹¹

The complete text of Isaiah’s prophecy reads: ‘A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’’⁹²

Luke’s quotation of Isaiah’s prophecy is rather literal. The slight deviation at the end probably means that Luke used the existing Greek text of the Septuagint.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on John’s ministry: ‘Now, baptism, it is clear, was not at this time practiced among the Jews. It was not, as far as we can trace, even used in the case of pagan proselytes to Judaism. This apparently only became a national custom after the fall of Jerusalem, A.D. 70, forty years later. His very title, ‘the Baptist,’ in some way shows us that he practiced an unusual, if not a novel, rite in the course of his preaching and teaching. John’s baptism (to use [one Bible scholar’s] vivid expressions) was just the embodiment, in significant *optical* symbolism, of the significant audible symbolism of the Old Testament prophets, when they cried aloud and said, ‘Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes’ (... Isaiah 1:16); ‘In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness’ (Zechariah 13:1); ‘Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you’ (... Ezekiel 36:25, 26). This view of John’s baptism, viz. that it was a symbol, and nothing more, was suggested by Josephus writing for the Jews. ‘John,’ he says, ‘enjoined upon the Jews first to cultivate virtue and to put in practice righteousness toward one another, and piety toward God, and then to come to his baptism, for thus only would the baptism be acceptable to God.’’

When the angel Gabriel announced the birth of John to his father Zechariah, he said: ‘Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous — to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’⁹³ It may be difficult for us to find the fulfillment of this prediction in the text of John’s preaching as reported by Luke. We must bear in mind, however, that Luke only gives us a fragment of John’s sermons. From *Matthew’s Gospel* we learn that it was particularly in addressing the Pharisees and Sadducees that John used the words ‘You brood of vipers!’⁹⁴

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on vv.7-9: ‘Where Matthew mentions Pharisees and Sadducees as John’s hearers, Luke names *the multitudes*. John’s message was for the whole nation. His words as recorded here are almost identical with those in Matthew 3:7-10. Of sixty-three words in the Greek the only differences are Luke’s *fruits* and *begin* (8) where Matthew has ‘fruit and ‘presume.’ The paragraph is heavy with judgment. John condemns his hearers as *vipers* trying to flee *the wrath to come*. The wrath of God is an important topic in both Testaments. It stresses the divine hostility to all evil. With this we take *the axe* laying by *the root of the trees*. The trees are not yet cut down. But the warning is clear. In between, John reminds his audience that repentance must be shown by the appropriate *fruits*. He warns them against relying on Abrahamic descent. Jews were apt to think that God would ultimately be kind to them because of Abraham’s merits if they had none of their own. John reminds them that we stand before God as individuals. There may be a play on words between stones and children, Aramaic ‘*abnayya*’ and *bēnayya*.’’

Comparing the quotation from Isaiah with the text of John’s preaching, we observe that the valleys, mountains, hills, and crooked paths are symbolic of the condition of the human heart. The object John wanted to achieve was people’s repentance. The Greek word *metanoia* stands for a change of mind, or a reversal of direction, both of which require a decision.

⁹¹ John 1:23

⁹² Isa. 40:3-5

⁹³ Luke 1:16,17

⁹⁴ Matt. 3:7

The question remains whether it is possible for a human being to repent on his own initiative. In committing sin we enter into bogs in which a sense of direction is virtually impossible. We need the ministry of the Holy Spirit even to come under conviction of sin. After Pentecost, the Apostles preached, saying that repentance was God's gift to His people. 'God exalted [Jesus] to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.'⁹⁵ Without God's gift of repentance we will not even be sorry for our sins.

John preached to people who had received the law and to whom God had revealed Himself. The moral law held up before them the requirements of God's holiness, which were beyond human reach. God had said: 'I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.'⁹⁶ He also said: 'I am the Lord, who makes you holy.'⁹⁷ Repentance, therefore, does not merely mean a change of direction brought about by making up one's mind; it means allowing the Spirit of God to operate those changes that bring about holiness within us.

John held up God's judgment before his hearers in order to evoke in them a holy fear of condemnation. He wanted them to take hell seriously enough to do something about their lives.

The Pulpit Commentary observes about John's scathing language in calling his audience 'brood of vipers': 'In St. Matthew's account of John's work such scathing words as these were addressed to members of the Pharisee and Sadducee sects, who evidently flocked in great numbers to his baptism. They were alarmed and disturbed at his preaching; they feared that that drear time of awful suffering, generally known as the 'woes of Messiah,' a period which their great rabbis had told them would precede Messiah's advent, was at hand; they would provide themselves with some talisman against this time of sore calamity. The inspired predictor of these 'woes' — men evidently looked on John as such — bade them come to his baptism; this baptism would be surely a safeguard, an easy bit of ritual, thought they, and one that readily approved itself to men trained in the rabbis' schools of that age, so they came to him in numbers. But John read their hearts; hence his stern fiery rebukes. 'Let it be borne in mind that only teachers of transcendent holiness, and immediately inspired by God with fervency and insight, may dare to use such language.'

In giving his last prophetic blessings to his twelve sons, Jacob said to his son Dan, 'Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward.'⁹⁸ John's calling a section of his audience 'brood of vipers,' is not different from Jesus later remark: 'You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.'⁹⁹

John's reference to the rocks from which God could create offspring that would bear the name of Abraham as their ancestor, is difficult to envision. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* suggests that it is 'Perhaps an allusion to Isa 51:1-2, but more likely a reference to the pebbles at John's feet, which could be made to respond to the creative touch of God, as Adam was formed from the dust.' The reference to Isaiah's prophecy reads: 'Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many.'¹⁰⁰

Some Bible scholars believe that 'these stones' refers to the Roman soldiers that were occupying the land at that time.

Although it is clear that John's words cannot be taken literally true or even plausible, the intent of his warning is clear. Resting upon mere physical pedigree does not constitute a spiritual inheritance. The Apostle Paul concurs with John's message, saying: 'Consider Abraham: 'He believed God, and it was

⁹⁵ Acts 5:31

⁹⁶ Lev. 11:44

⁹⁷ Lev. 20:8

⁹⁸ Gen. 49:17

⁹⁹ John 8:44

¹⁰⁰ Isa. 51:1,2

credited to him as righteousness. Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.¹⁰¹ Abraham's faith can only be appropriated by demonstrating the same kind of faith he exhibited.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on John's mention of the axe at the root of the trees: 'The Divine Woodman had already laid the axe at the root of the tree of Israel; its hours, as the peculiar people, were indeed numbered. Let these, who said they were willing to wash and be clean, be ready and bring forth fruit worthy of their high calling and the lofty prerogative of which they boasted. The last of the prophets, from his lonely watch-tower of unerring insight into the future, saw the awful coming doom of the loved city, the scattering and captivity of the remnant of the chosen people. Within forty years of that time would the fatal axe, now lying at the root of the tree, be lifted. In uttering this stern prophetic saying, we believe John was gazing at the storm gathering round Jerusalem, which in A.D. 70 swept away city and temple, and destroyed the existence of Israel as a nation. When he preached it was about A.D. 30-32.'

John's warning could be taken to be directed at the nation of Israel as a whole. That would mean that Israel would lose its status as God's chosen people. But 'trees' is plural, referring to individuals, not the whole nation. Repentance must be done on a personal scale. The fruit produced must be the fruit visible in the lives of individuals.

Some of the people in John's audience asked the pertinent question as to how repentance was to show itself. John's answer is very practical and it reveals the scope of social injustice that must have prevailed in the nation. There must have been a huge gap between the very rich and the very poor. But John did not just address the very rich. Many of the people would have possessed more than one tunic.

John's message about repentance shows that, although repentance pertains to our relationship with God, it demonstrates itself in our relationship with our fellowmen. Jesus' parable about the forgiven servant who refused to forgive those who were indebted to him,¹⁰² illustrates this truth.

Besides reporting the general question asked by the public, Luke mentions two particular groups of people that approached John, asking what repentance would mean in their case: tax collectors and soldiers. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes about the tax collectors: 'The Romans taxed people by farming out the taxing rights to the highest bidder. The successful man would pay Rome the amount he bid, but he would collect more than that to pay expenses and to give him his legitimate profit. But it was a strong temptation to levy more tax than was strictly necessary and to pocket the extra. This provoked resentment, especially among the patriotic, who in any case did not like to see Jews helping the Romans by collecting their taxes from them. A vicious circle developed: the more they overtaxed the more they were hated and the more they were hated the more they overtaxed. The *tax collectors* who came to John's baptism were the agents of the tax farmers (or small independent contractors ...), not the tax farmers themselves. John's preaching had convinced some of them that what they were doing was wrong and they wanted to express their repentance in baptism. John's advice is *Collect no more than is appointed you.*' John does not chide them for collaboration with a foreign government. He does not condemn their unpatriotic behavior. Evidently, God is not interested in what is politically correct.

There is some question about who were the 'soldiers' who came to John. *Barnes' Notes* observes: 'Whether these were Jews or Romans cannot be ascertained. It is not improbable that, as Judea was a Roman province, they were Jews or Jewish proselytes in the service of Herod Antipas or Philip, and so were really in the Roman service.' They may have been armed Jews who accompanied the tax collectors in order to provide protection. It seems doubtful that Romans would come to John in order to be baptized. Roman citizens could hardly be expected to be awaiting the coming of a Jewish Messiah.

The Greek text of John's answer to the soldiers is more picturesque than any English translation conveys. It reads literally: 'Do violence to no man neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.' The Greek word rendered 'do violence' is *diaseio*, which literally means 'to shake thoroughly,' or 'to intimidate.' The word for 'accuse falsely' is even more interesting. *Sukophanteo* literally means 'to be a fig-informer.' It refers to a 'reporter of the law forbidding the exportation of figs from Greece.'

¹⁰¹ Gal. 3:6,7

¹⁰² See Matt. 18:23-35.

Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers who mentions that the people were thinking that John could be the Messiah they expected. We may suppose, however, that John's answer, given in John's Gospel 'I am not the Christ,'¹⁰³ was prompted by questions asked by people who were considering the possibility that he were.

John's baptism was clearly a preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Although John denied being the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy: 'See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse,'¹⁰⁴ calling himself merely 'the voice of one calling in the desert,'¹⁰⁵ he was the King's herald who prepared the way.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on John's answer: 'John repudiates the idea. He makes two points: he is inferior to Someone who is yet to come and his baptism is likewise inferior. The Successor, says John, is *mightier than I*. In sheer power he surpasses John. And when it comes to worth, John sees himself as unfit to loose *the thong of his sandals*. Palestinian teachers were not paid, but pupils used to show their appreciation with a variety of services. A rabbinic saying (in its present form dated c. 250 but probably much older) runs, 'Every service which a slave performs for his master shall a disciple do for his teacher except the loosing of his sandal-thong.' ... Untying the sandal-thong was just too much. But John selects precisely this duty, which the rabbis regarded too menial for a disciple, as that for which he was unworthy. This is genuine humility.'

John's water baptism was symbolic for the spiritual baptism Jesus would administer, which John describes as baptism 'with the Holy Spirit and with fire.' John's wording has been the subject of much discussion among Bible scholars. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: 'The reference to *fire* is taken by some to be in apposition with *Spirit*, 'the fire of the Spirit' ..., by some to mean testing, ... by others to point to judgment. The context favors the last-mentioned, and [one Bible scholar] has drawn attention to a passage in the Dead Sea scrolls referring to an eschatological fire of judgment which he thinks supports this interpretation. But it is the same people who are baptized with the Holy Spirit as with fire (and the two are governed by one *en* in the Greek). It seems best to see John as thinking of positive and negative aspects of the Messiah's message. Those who accept him will be purified as by fire (cf. Mal. 3:1ff) and strengthened by the Holy Spirit.'

Morris' conclusion that it is the same people who are baptized with the Holy Spirit as with fire is debatable. One strong argument against this is in the following text is that 'unquenchable fire' is mentioned that burns up the chaff. The picture of the winnowing of wheat on the threshing floor undoubtedly speaks of God's judgment that separates people, not of a process of individual cleansing.

The Pulpit Commentary, however, disagrees with that interpretation and states: 'Not with *punitive* fire, which interpretation would be quite alien from the context here. Those expositors who have adopted this meaning of the fire here have been most likely influenced by the mention of the unquenchable fire in the next sentence. The fire which was to enter into Messiah's baptism was rather *the flame of purification*. So we read of the coal of fire taken from off the altar and laid on the mouth of Isaiah the prophet (... Isaiah 6:6, 7). 'With fire,' writes Bishop Wordsworth, 'to purify, illumine, transform, inflame with holy fervor and zeal, and carry upward, as Elijah was carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire.'" Suffice to say that the section is subject to various interpretations.

At this point in his ministry, John envisioned the ultimate result of the Messiah's coming. Although he had announced at one point that Jesus was 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,'¹⁰⁶ we find no trace here of that crucial truth which forms the center of God's plan of salvation. The judgment John spoke about would not take place until the end of time. In Jesus' sermon in the synagogue in Nazareth, He closed the book after reading 'to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,' and before 'the day of vengeance of our God,' which followed in Isaiah's text.¹⁰⁷ Evidently, John believed that the preaching of hellfire would be a stronger inducement to repentance than the preaching of grace. John saw his ministry, at

¹⁰³ John 1:20

¹⁰⁴ Mal. 4:5,6

¹⁰⁵ John 1:23

¹⁰⁶ John 1:29

¹⁰⁷ Isa. 61:2

that point, as a ‘preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.’¹⁰⁸ The main emphasis, however, was on repentance, which was man’s responsibility. In a conversation of the Apostle Paul with some of John’s disciples in Ephesus, Paul said: ‘John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’¹⁰⁹ John could not bring about salvation; he could only prepare people by telling them to repent. For our eternal salvation, no other Name is given under heaven than the Name of Jesus.¹¹⁰

The Greek text of v.18 reads literally: ‘And [in his] many other exhortations he preached unto the people.’ The words ‘good news’ are not in the original text. The Greek verb rendered ‘preached’ is *euaggelizo*, which can be rendered ‘to evangelize.’ Whether one wants to include the message of judgment into this, is a matter of opinion. In as much as the warning can lead people to repentance, it could be seen as part of the message. *The New King James Version* simply states: ‘And with many other exhortations he preached to the people.’

Luke does not give us the details of John’s tragic end, as Matthew does. He merely states that Herod put John in prison ‘because of Herodias, his brother’s wife.’ *The Pulpit Commentary* comments upon this: ‘It did not enter into St. Luke’s plan to write any detailed account of the circumstances which led to the death of the Baptist. The story (related at length by St. Matthew) was, no doubt, well known in all the Gentile Churches. He simply mentions the act which consigned the dauntless preacher to the dungeons of Herod’s palace-fortress, close to the Dead Sea; it was termed Macha, or Machaerus. In closing his little sketch of the work of his Master’s great pioneer, St. Luke wishes to show that the fearless Baptist was no respecter of persons. The despised collector of Roman tribute, the rough free lance or mercenary, the nameless legionary of Rome, was attacked for his evil life and his wanton excesses, with no greater hardihood than the prince who sat on the throne of the mighty Herods. True servant of his brave and patient Master, he paid the penalty of his splendid courage and, ‘like so many of earth’s great ones, he passed through pain and agony to his rest.’’

3. The beginning of Jesus’ ministry 3:21-4:13

A. Jesus’ baptism 3:21-22

21 *When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened*

22 *and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’*

In mentioning Jesus’ baptism, Luke leaves out many of the details we find in Matthew’s Gospel. We do not read here about John’s objection which Jesus overruled by saying: ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.’¹¹¹ Luke’s main reason for mentioning the incident is probably to indicate that this was the moment at which Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and received audible evidence of the Father’s approval. This was the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry.

As *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: ‘The answers to the question, What was the reason of Jesus’ baptism? have been many. In this, as in many things connected with the earthly life of our Lord, there is much that is mysterious, and we can never hope here to solve these difficulties with any completeness.’ The most reasonable explanation seems to be that, generally speaking, baptism is an outward expression of an inward decision. To most of John’s candidate it meant that they had decided to repent of their sins by confession and asking for forgiveness. In order to seal this decision, they entered the water that symbolized their inner cleansing. Jesus could not identify with that part of the rite, since He had no sins to confess. But we may assume that in His development as a human being there must have been a growing awareness of a heavenly call. As He grew up His mother must have told Him the circumstances of His conception and birth. The heavenly blueprint of His life was laid out before Him, but it was not forced upon Him. He was

¹⁰⁸ Luke 3:3

¹⁰⁹ Acts 19:1-4

¹¹⁰ Acts 4:12

¹¹¹ Matt. 3:15

born to be the Messiah, but in order to fulfill His ministry He had to consent. David may have prophesied what His answer would be in the Psalm that reads: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, ‘Here I am, I have come — it is written about me in the scroll,’¹¹² but without Jesus repeating this vow Himself, His call would not have become a reality. Once the decision was made, Jesus wanted it to be sealed, which was why He entered the water and asked to be baptized.

Jesus’ prayer as He came out of the water may have contained a quotation of the above-mentioned Psalm. The Father answered this prayer immediately, vocally by speaking, and visibly by sending the Spirit.

B. Jesus’ genealogy 3:23-38

23 Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph,

25 the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda,

27 the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri,

28 the son of Melki, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er,

29 the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi,

30 the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim,

31 the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David,

32 the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon,

33 the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah,

34 the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor,

35 the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah,

36 the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,

37 the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Kenan,

38 the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

In introducing this section, Leon Morris, in Luke, writes: ‘Luke’s genealogy differs greatly from that in Matthew. He gives the line from Adam to Abraham as Matthew does not; they are practically the same from Abraham to David, and they diverge from that point on. There are three chief explanations of all this.’ We will only copy the first one, in which Morris explains: ‘Some suggest that Matthew gives us the genealogy of Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, while Luke gives that of Mary, the actual line of Jesus. This understands Joseph, the son of Heli as ‘Joseph, the son of Heli by marriage.’ Against this it is urged that it is not what Luke says, that he does not mention Mary, and that in any case genealogies were not traced through the female line. Luke, however, is speaking of a virgin birth, and we have no information as to how a genealogy would be reckoned when there was no human father. The case is unique.’

So much has been written about the differences between Matthew’s genealogy and Luke’s that it would be redundant to add more. The suggestion that the purpose of Matthew’s genealogy is to establish the descent of Jesus from King David, which would give Him the right to the throne of Israel, would be in accordance with the purpose for which Matthew wrote. Matthew traces the line to David via Solomon. We read: ‘David was the father of Solomon.’¹¹³ Luke is not interested in proving that Jesus was the heir to

¹¹² Ps. 40:6,7

¹¹³ Matt. 1:6

David's throne as the legal pretender. He traces Jesus' descent from David via Nathan: 'the son of Nathan, the son of David ...'¹¹⁴ It seems logical to assume that this was the line through which Mary traced her descent from David. The fact that Luke goes back all the way to Adam, whom he calls 'the son of God'¹¹⁵ is significant. There may be a world of theological significance in Luke's use of the term in connection with Adam. Luke may have been influenced by Paul at this point, who wrote that 'Adam ... was a pattern of the one to come.'¹¹⁶

There is also a strong suggestion in Luke's wording that Jesus came to accomplish what had been Adam's original task. God had put Adam in charge of His whole creation. If it is true, as some Bible scholars believe, that the creation story we read in the first chapters of Genesis, is actually a recreation of what God had made originally, but what had been ruined by the fall of Lucifer, Adam had the task of reclaiming and protecting what God had made. Instead of doing this, he joined the enemy. 'The son of God' became God's enemy.

To go back to Paul's presumed influence on Luke in this matter, we read in Paul's epistles that Jesus Christ is referred to as 'the last Adam,' and 'the second man.'¹¹⁷

Leon Morris, in Luke, writes: 'Luke adds the son of God, for we must see Jesus ultimately in his relationship to the Father. In this the genealogy harmonizes with the preceding and the following narratives, both of which are concerned with Jesus as the Son of God.'

C. Jesus' temptations 4:1-13

- 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert,*
- 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.*
- 3 The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'*
- 4 Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.''*
- 5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.*
- 6 And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.*
- 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours.'*
- 8 Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.''*
- 9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down from here.*
- 10 For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully;*
- 11 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.''*
- 12 Jesus answered, 'It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.''*
- 13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

We find the story of Jesus' temptation also in detail in Matthew's Gospel. Mark simply mentions the fact without giving details. We read in Mark: 'At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.'¹¹⁸

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states about the desert: 'The traditional scene of the Temptation is a barren territory northwest of the Dead Sea, completely devoid of vegetation or shelter of any kind.'

¹¹⁴ Luke 3:31

¹¹⁵ Luke 3:38

¹¹⁶ Rom. 5:14

¹¹⁷ I Cor. 15:45,47

¹¹⁸ Mark 1:12,13

Jesus probably went into the desert for the purpose of preparing Himself, spiritually, mentally and emotionally for the task ahead, not necessarily or consciously to undergo temptation. His intent must have been to have fellowship with the Father, but the Holy Spirit allowed Satan to interfere.

The Pulpit Commentary states about Jesus' temptation: 'The consecration of our Lord in his baptism was immediately followed by what is known as his temptation. It is, perhaps, the most mysterious and least understood of any of the scenes of the public ministry related by the evangelists. What, now, was the temptation? Did the evil one appear to Jesus actually in a *bodily* form? Did his feet really press some elevation, such as the summit of snowy Hermon, or the still more inaccessible peak of Ararat? and did the far-reaching prospect of sea and land, mountain and valley, bathed in the noonday glory of an Eastern sun, represent to him the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them? Did he in very truth stand on the summit of the great temple-roof, and from that dizzy height gaze on the crowds below, crawling like ants across the sacred court, or toiling along the Jerusalem streets?

So *generally* thought the ancients, and so it would appear, on first thoughts, from St. Matthew's account, where we read (... Matthew 4:3), 'The tempter came to him;' and the vivid realistic imagery of St. Mark (... Mark 1:12, 13) would rather help us to the same conclusion. Some expositors and students of the Word have imagined — for it comes to little more — that the devil manifested himself to Jesus under the guise of an angel of light; others prove supposed the tempter came to him as a wayfaring man; others, as a priest, as one of the Sanhedrin council. But on further consideration all this seems highly improbable. No appearance of the devil, or of any evil angel, is ever related in the Bible records. The mountain whence the view of the world's kingdoms was obtained after all is fanciful, and any realistic interpretation is thoroughly unsatisfactory and improbable. The greater of the modern scholars of different countries ... reject altogether the idea of a presence of the tempter visible to the eye of sense. The whole transaction lay in the spiritual region of the life of Christ, but on that account it was not the less real and true.'

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: 'The story is of great interest in that it cannot have come from anyone other than Jesus himself. Clearly he faced questions like: What sort of Messiah was he to be? Was he to use his powers for personal ends? Or for the establishing of a mighty empire that would rule the world in righteousness? Or for working spectacular, if pointless, miracles? He rejected all these for what they were, temptations of the devil. That they were temptations implies that Jesus knew that he had unusual powers. 'It is no temptation to us to turn stones into bread or leap from a Temple pinnacle' [one Bible scholar's observation]. But Jesus was not bound by our limitations. He knew he had powers other men do not have and he had to decide how to use them.'

Before entering into the Gospel text, I want to voice some objections to both commentaries. I do not believe that Jesus' temptation was not a genuine, tangible encounter with the enemy; that it was, so to speak, 'all in the head.' Satan knew whom he was facing, and I believe it is likely that he appeared personally before Jesus. Whether Jesus saw him as a person in human form or not cannot be established.

I also believe that Jesus' miracles were all the result of His faith in the Father's power. For example, at the resurrection of Lazarus, we read that Jesus prayed before He called Lazarus back to life, saying: 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.'¹¹⁹ As a matter of fact, this was exactly the point Satan tried to make in his temptation of Jesus, that Jesus had power in Himself to perform miracles and that He should try this out before showing Himself to the world.

It is significant to observe that, not only the Holy Spirit allowed Jesus to be tempted, but He led Jesus to the place, both physically and spiritually where temptation could take place. The One who is being tempted here is not the Son of God, but the Son of Man.

The question has been asked, and much debated, whether Jesus could have fallen in this temptation. Those who believe He could not, argue that Jesus did not have a sinful nature. This could be refuted by saying that Adam and Eve had no sinful nature either when they were tempted. Their sinful nature was the result of the temptation in which they fell. If it were impossible for Jesus to fail in temptations, the temptations would have been senseless.

¹¹⁹ John 11:41,42

From Matthew we get the impression that Jesus' temptation did not begin until the end of His forty-day fast.¹²⁰ Luke states that Jesus was tempted 'for forty days.' We do not read what was involved in that extended spiritual struggle. The ones we do read about are then the last three temptations of a whole series.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary introduces its comments on the temptations with the observation: 'It may be useful to remark here, that, during the forty days and forty nights in which he is said to have been tempted by the Devil, he is carried about, continually sustained and supported, by the Holy Spirit.' Being filled with the Holy Spirit does not mean that one cannot be tempted by Satan. It does mean, however, that the Spirit can remind us of the scriptural answers that can be given to the tempter.

As human beings, conceived from sinful parents and born with a sinful nature, it is impossible for us to fully enter into the condition of the struggle Jesus went through during this temptation. The closest we can come to Jesus' experience is, when we come to the point of our life where we question our identity, our spiritual status and our relationship with God.

In a sense, although on a much different level than we can ever reach, Jesus was faced with the question, 'Am I who I believe I am.' In His baptism, He had responded, as we saw, to David's prophecy: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come — it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.''¹²¹ The question Satan posed amounted to: 'Are you sure you are the One written about in the scroll?'

The form in which this question came was 'If you are the Son of God ...' The temptation was in the suggestion 'Prove it to me!' The essence of the temptation was rather 'Prove it to Yourself!' If Jesus had given in to that suggestion, the only proof He would have given would be that there had been doubt in His heart. It would have meant that Jesus doubted the reality of the voice from heaven at His baptism: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'¹²² A search for our identity usually means a doubt about God's love. Those who know the love of God have no reason ever to doubt who they are.

As suggested above, if Jesus had given in to Satan's suggestion and ordered the stone to become bread, He would have declared that He did not need the Father's power in order to perform miracles. As the Son of God, He was the Creator of that stone. But as the Son of Man, He needed to live by faith in the power of God, so that we could follow in His footsteps. Satan's temptation was much more than a suggestion that Jesus do something to satisfy His hunger at the end of a forty-day fast.

The Pulpit Commentary states: 'Weakened and exhausted by long abstinence from food, the temptation to supply his wants by this easy means at once was great. Still, had he consented to the tempter's suggestion, Jesus was aware that he would have broken the conditions of that human existence to which, in his deep love for us fallen beings, he had voluntarily consented and submitted himself. Should he, then, use his miraculous power for his own advantage? Then, remembering his own late experience, the long fast from all human food, and yet life enduring through it all; calling to mind the miraculous supply of manna in the old desert days, the preservation of Elijah's life through a similar fast, — Jesus, all faint and weary, exclaims in reply, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.''

The answer Jesus gave to Satan was a quotation from *The Book of Deuteronomy*, the full text of which reads: 'He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.'¹²³

There is more to Jesus' answer than meets the eye. In quoting a Scripture verse Jesus, first of all, indicates that the way to counter satanic temptations is not by matching our human wits with the craft of Satan. As far as intelligence and skill is concerned we are no match for the prince of darkness. He wins every time if we try to answer him in our own power. We need the sword of Word of God to counter and

¹²⁰ Matt. 4:1

¹²¹ Ps. 40:6-8

¹²² Luke 3:22

¹²³ Deut. 8:3

defeat him. If Eve had quoted God’s Word back to Satan, when he said to her ‘Did God really say ...’¹²⁴ we would all still be in Paradise.

Also, in quoting a verse from Deuteronomy, Jesus identified Himself with the people of Israel during the desert crossing on their way to the Promised Land. It elevates Israel’s history to the level of ‘the history of salvation.’

Finally, Jesus’ answer shows the relative significance of food as a means of sustenance of life. As human beings we are more than physical bodies. However miraculous the creation of our body may be, it is merely the envelope of our soul and spirit. The body is the part of us that will die and decompose. Our soul and spirit are meant to live eternally. Although there is an interaction between the three components that define our existence, the authority of the spirit over the soul and of the soul over the body constitutes a healthy condition. If the body dictates our behavior, we are in serious trouble. The spirit and soul have the power to govern the desires of the body. Sin tends to disturb this line of command, but in a healthy, spiritually minded person, who enjoys fellowship with God, the body is under the control of the spirit and soul. That is why Jesus could say to His disciples: ‘My food ... is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.’¹²⁵ It was because Jesus lived, as a human being ‘on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord,’ that He was able to survive a forty-day fast. He who created everything by the Word, and sustaining all things by His powerful word,¹²⁶ kept Himself alive by that same Word. In this also, He was ‘leaving [us] an example, that [we] should follow in his steps.’¹²⁷

In the second temptation, we read that ‘the devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.’ It is difficult to determine whether Jesus was literally taken to the top of a high mountain where His physical eye could see ‘all the kingdoms of the world.’ There is no place on earth from which one can literally see it all. It seems safe, therefore, to assume that Jesus remained in the desert during this temptation and that the temptation was shown to Him, to use an anachronism, as in a film.

Whereas, in the first temptation, Satan had addressed Jesus as ‘the Son of God,’ and tempted Him at that point, here he tempts Him as ‘the Son of Man.’ The prince of this world offers Him the power to rule the whole world as a human being. Toward the end of world history, Satan will make the same offer to another human being, who will accept the offer and become the Antichrist. John describes this with the poetic language of Revelation as follows: ‘The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.’¹²⁸ *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: ‘This temptation was something more than ‘offering to One who had lived as a village carpenter the throne of the world.’ It appealed to his ambition certainly, but in Jesus’ case it was a high, pure, sinless ambition. This much he certainly knew already, that he was destined to rule over men from pole to pole. It was for him a righteous longing, this desire to have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth as his possession. No false ambition was this in Jesus, this desire to realize the glorious Messianic hope. Again, how typical a temptation! All ranks and orders are often soon tempted here. A noble end as they think, and in the beauty of the goal they forget that the road leading to it is paved with evil and wrong.’

We know little about the role Lucifer played in God’s plan of creation. It is assumed that, before his fall, Lucifer was the archangel to whom the care of planet earth had been entrusted. He may, in fact, have been ‘the prince of this world’ by the authority God had given to him. When he fell from grace, he ought to have vacated our planet, but he didn’t. It was like some situation we still see happening, where the president of a country is voted out of office, but refuses the move out of the presidential palace. Satan’s claim to be the prince of this world may have been illegal, but it was factual. We read in The Book of Daniel that some of Satan’s minions are called ‘the prince of Persia,’ and ‘the prince of Greece.’¹²⁹ Satan’s offer to Jesus was to make Him the prince of the whole world, as his sole representative, but submitting to his authority.

Satan must have known that Christ’s kingdom was not of this world, but he either chose to ignore this or he may have thought that Jesus had not come to the realization of this part of His ministry yet. In testifying

¹²⁴ Gen. 3:1

¹²⁵ John 4:34

¹²⁶ Heb. 1:3

¹²⁷ I Peter 2:21

¹²⁸ Rev. 13:2

¹²⁹ Dan. 10:20

to Pilate, Jesus would later say: ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place. ... I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’¹³⁰ Jesus could have said the same to Satan here, but what would have been the point of speaking of truth to the father of lies?

Jesus’ answer is a free quotation of Deuteronomy 6:13, which reads literally: ‘Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.’ Although the Hebrew word *yare*, which is used in the text, generally means ‘to fear,’ it also has, in certain contexts, the meaning of ‘to revere.’ As such we find it in the Psalm verse: ‘For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is *to be feared* above all gods.’ In the well-known verse in Proverbs, ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,’¹³¹ the related word *yir’ah*, ‘fear’ is used as a noun. There is in the use of the word also the suggestion that we fear the Lord because He is awesome because of His greatness, omnipotence and glory. None of those attributes can be ascribed to Satan.

In some manuscripts the words ‘Get behind Me, Satan!’¹³² are added. The newer translations omit this, since they do not occur in the oldest manuscripts.

In connection with the third temptation, which Matthew records as the second, we face the same question as to whether Jesus physically left the desert, or that He actually stood at one particular point on top of the temple building. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: ‘The part of the great building evidently referred to here was that magnificent southern wing of the Lord’s house constructed by Herod the Great, which was known as the royal portico. Josephus calls it *the most remarkable building under the sun* ... One who stood on the roof of this portion of the temple would look from a dizzy height into the Valley of the Kidron. Such a spectator, writes Josephus ... ‘would be giddy while his sight could not reach to such an immense depth.’ To this spot, ‘whether in the body or out of the body’ we cannot tell, Jesus was taken by the evil spirit.’

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: ‘The temptation may have been to perform a spectacular, but pointless miracle in order to compel wonder and belief of a kind. But since nobody else is said to have been present the temptation may rather have been, as Jesus’ answer seems to indicate, that of presuming on God instead of trusting him humbly. [One Bible scholar] draws attention to an important point when he cites Augustine’s comment that Satan can do no more than suggest: only the tempted person can perform the wrong act (throw *yourself* down). The evil one on this occasion quotes Scripture (Ps. 91:11f.) to assure Jesus that he would be safe enough. But this is a wrong use of the Bible. It is twisting the text to suit a purpose. Jesus rejects this temptation as he had the other two by appealing to the real meaning of the Bible (Deut. 6:16). It is not for a member of the human race to put God to the test, not even when the member in question is the Son of God incarnate.

On all three occasions Jesus countered the temptation by quoting from Deuteronomy and in fact from the restricted area between 6:13 and 8:3, chapters that refer to the wilderness experiences of Israel, the people of God. It may well be that Jesus had given a lot of thought to these passages as he reflected on the mission to which God was calling him. There were parallels in the experience of the ancient people of God to those in his own experience. He was one with the people of God.’

It is interesting that Satan chose that particular verse from Psalm 91 and that he only quoted the Psalm partially. Satan carefully avoided the next verse that reads: ‘You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.’¹³³

It must be observed that, whereas in the first temptation Satan tempted Jesus on the point of being ‘the Son of God,’ in the other two Jesus was being tempted as the Son of Man. Those temptations pertained to His relationship with the Father as a human being.

Luke merely states at this point that the devil left Jesus, omitting Matthew’s text that reads: ‘Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’’’¹³⁴ And

¹³⁰ John 18:36,37

¹³¹ Prov. 1:7

¹³² NKJV

¹³³ Ps. 91:13

neither of these Gospel writers adds what we read in Mark's Gospel: 'He was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.'¹³⁵

4. Jesus in Galilee 4:14-30

A. The sermon at Nazareth 4:14-30

14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

15 He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read.

17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him,

21 and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked.

23 Jesus said to them, 'Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'

24 'I tell you the truth,' he continued, 'no prophet is accepted in his hometown.

25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land.

26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.

27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed — only Naaman the Syrian.'

28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.

29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff.

30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, introduces this section with the following: 'Luke appears to be referring to an incident put later by Matthew and Mark. He does not regard it as the beginning of Jesus' ministry, for he knows of earlier work (14-15), though he does not choose to describe it. But right at the outset Luke shows that Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah. This was the kind of ministry that Jesus would exercise. These are the themes that would recur.'

As a matter of fact, Matthew and Mark do not report the incident in the synagogue in Nazareth that Luke describes here. They only mention that Jesus was in Nazareth and left it.

¹³⁴ Matt. 4:10

¹³⁵ Mark 1:13

Luke does not mention how long Jesus had been away from His hometown. It is obvious that this visit to Nazareth was not the beginning of Jesus' ministry, because there is mention of miracles performed in Capernaum, at a distance of a little more than 20 miles from Nazareth. Luke mentions in general terms Jesus' ministry in Galilee, but he does not tell us how long that lasted.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: 'Matthew, Mark, and Luke begin Jesus' ministry with Galilee; John records an earlier ministry in Judea (John 2:13-4:3).'

Returning to His hometown, Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: 'This had been for years his practice in the little synagogue of the village where was his carpenter's shop. Children at the age of five years were admitted into the synagogue, and at thirteen attendance there was part of the legal life of the Jew. These synagogues were the regular places for religious gatherings every sabbath day, and also usually on Mondays and Tuesdays, besides on other special occasions. We hear of them after the return from the Captivity, and probably they existed long before. Some think that in ... Psalm 74:8 there is a reference to them.'

There is some difference of opinion among Bible scholars regarding the custom of Scripture reading followed during the services in synagogues. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: 'There is no sufficient ground for supposing that our Lord fixed upon the portion for the day. The language used rather implies the contrary-that it was a portion selected by Himself for the occasion.' *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, however, observes: 'The synagogue followed a regular order of readings. Jesus probably took the passage that was usually read on that day.'

It seems that Jesus did not choose the scroll from which the reading was to be done. We read: 'The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.' But the section to be read was, evidently, Jesus' choice. The verses chosen were the first two from Chapter Sixty-One.

When we compare Isaiah's text as it appears in the NIV, with Luke's copy of it, we find considerable differences. Part of this may be due to the fact that Luke probably quoted from the Septuagint. Isaiah's text reads: 'The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn.' In Luke it appears as: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' The differences may also be explained by the fact the Jesus may have chosen several texts in the scroll. If it were a book, we could have said that He flipped the pages. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments upon the text Jesus read: 'This is found in Isa 61:1; but our Lord immediately adds to it Isa 42:7. The proclaiming of liberty to the captives, and the acceptable year (or year of acceptance) of the Lord, is a manifest allusion to the proclaiming of the year of jubilee by sound of trumpet: see Lev 25:9, etc. ... This was a year of general release of debts and obligations; of bond-men and women; of lands and possessions, which had been sold from the families and tribes to which they belonged. Our Savior, by applying this text to himself, a text so manifestly relating to the institution above mentioned, plainly declares the typical design of that institution.'

It seems to have been customary for the preacher in the synagogue to stand during the reading of the Scriptures and to sit down while preaching. The whole congregation may have been standing during the reading of the Word of God.

An important part of the story is that Jesus closed the scroll before reading the last words of Isaiah's text: 'and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn.' Jesus had not come to judge at this point, but to heal and to proclaim the Year of Jubilee.

As Jesus began to preach, His audience listened attentively and initially with great approval. There may have been some encouraging comments coming from the congregation. We must not project the picture of a church service, as we know it in the culture in which we live, upon the situation of that day. There probably was more interaction between preacher and congregation than we are used to, except, maybe, in some present-day African-American churches.

Jesus announcement that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in their hearing met with approving halleluiahs. But then the mood of the congregation changes and Luke does not give us any precise indications as to what was the cause. It is obvious that what we read in Luke's account of the sermon is only a fraction of Jesus' address.

There must have been at least two factors that determined the change of mood. This was Jesus' hometown; the people had known Him as a child and then as a teenager. They knew His family. He was known as the carpenter's Son, not as the prophet. Then they had heard of miracles performed in other places and the synagogue was probably packed to the full by people who had come to see something sensational, but nothing happened. In Matthew's account of Jesus' visit to Nazareth, we read: 'And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.'¹³⁶ The general reaction of the people in Nazareth was 'who does this fellow think he is?'

The Greek text of v.22 reads literally: 'And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, is this not Joseph's son?' The Greek word for 'bare witness' is *martureo*, from which the English word 'martyr' is derived. The word rendered 'wondered' is *thaumazo*, 'to admire.' The word is not always used in Scripture in that positive sense. We find it, for instance, in the verse: 'Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.'¹³⁷ Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: 'As he spoke the villagers came to see that what they had heard about him was true and they said so. They were impressed by his *gracious words*, i.e. his attractive way of speaking. They were astonished that someone from their own town, one whom they could call *Joseph's son*, could speak like this. Notice that Luke speaks of astonishment, not admiration or appreciation. They wondered at his preaching, but they did not take it to heart.' What God had said to Ezekiel about the people in captivity, could be applied to the people of Nazareth also: 'My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.'¹³⁸

What the people in Nazareth expected was not merely a good sermon, but the performance of a few miracles that would satisfy their hunger for sensation. Jesus' quotation of the proverb 'Physician, heal yourself!' has been strangely misunderstood by some Bible scholars. Jesus' hearers interpreted Jesus' words about the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, not as good news for them, but as aggrandizement of Jesus' own person. Their conclusion was not that they needed healing, but that Jesus did. *Barnes' Notes* gives the clearest comments on this: 'This proverb was probably in common use at that time. The meaning is this: Suppose that a man should attempt to heal another when he was himself diseased in the same manner; it would be natural to ask him FIRST to cure himself, and thus to render it manifest that he was worthy of confidence. The connection of this proverb, here, is this: 'You profess to be the Messiah. You have performed miracles at Capernaum. You profess to be able to deliver us from our maladies, our sins, our afflictions. Show that you have the power, that you are worthy of our confidence, by working miracles HERE, as you profess to have done at Capernaum.' It does not refer, therefore, to any purification of his own, or imply any reflection on him for setting up to teach them. It was only a demand that he would show the proper evidence 'by miracles' why they should trust in him, and he proceeds to show them why he would not give them this evidence.'

It is to this attitude of unbelief and cynicism that Jesus responds by quoting the examples of Elijah in Zarephath, and the healing of Naaman the Syrian. What the people of Nazareth displayed was typical of the attitude of Israel as a whole. They knew themselves to be 'God's chosen people,' and they thought that God had chosen them because they were so special to begin with. God's choosing was not, in their thought, a manifestation of God's grace, but an indication of God's 'good taste.' God knew a good people when He saw one! Applied to Jesus, this meant that, if Jesus was who He said He was, He owed them some miracles. To this Jesus replied by choosing two examples of God's choice of people who were not Israelites: the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian. *The Pulpit Commentary* makes the following remarkable observation: 'There is something interesting in our finding this proverb in the Gospel of the beloved

¹³⁶ See Matt. 13:54-58.

¹³⁷ Luke 1:21

¹³⁸ Ezek. 33:31,32

physician. May we think of him as hearing the proverb casually, tracking out its application, and so coming on this history? It was, probably, so far as is known, a common Jewish proverb; but there is no trace of it in Greek writers, and it was therefore likely to attract his notice'

The same commentary continues: 'The Jews of Nazareth, after the first moment of surprise and admiration at Jesus' words, evidently looked at him with scorn and unbelief. That poor Carpenter their glorious expected Messiah! As for the marvelous deeds reported to have been done in Capernaum, they did not believe in them; at least why did he not here, in the neighborhood of his own home, something of the same kind? If they could see with their eyes marvels worked by him, then perhaps they might accept him as Messiah.'

We could ask why Jesus did not perform any miracles in Nazareth. The sight of miracles does, generally, not produce the kind of faith that changes people's heart. The miracles Jesus performed in Capernaum did not bring about a spiritual revival either. We read Jesus' condemnation of that city and other in which He had performed miracles: 'Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.'¹³⁹

The reaction of Jesus' audience in the synagogue in Nazareth was most amazing. Their actions seem to be demonically inspired. An evil spirit inspired the mob to kill their own Son. It is difficult to imagine that such a thing could happen 'in church.' The people plan to commit murder in the house of the Lord. They knew, however, that they could not kill anyone in that building, so they dragged Jesus out to the top of the hill on which the village was built, intending to throw Him down the cliff to His death. If Satan was behind this, he must have had a lapse of memory. When he tempted Jesus to throw Himself down from the roof of the temple, he had quoted the Scripture verse: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'¹⁴⁰ But this time, when Jesus comes to the top of the hill, He binds the strong man, which disarmed the angry mob and simply walks away. Nobody was able to do Him any harm.

B. Jesus healing 4:31-41

1. The man with an unclean spirit 4:31-37

31 Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people.

32 They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.

33 In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice,

34 'Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are — the Holy One of God!'

35 'Be quiet!' Jesus said sternly. 'Come out of him!' Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.

36 All the people were amazed and said to each other, 'What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!'

37 And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

From Nazareth, Jesus went to Capernaum. According to Mark, that was where Jesus had taken up residence. 'A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.'¹⁴¹ We may assume that Jesus had made Capernaum His home before His visit to Nazareth. Whether

¹³⁹ Matt. 11:21-24

¹⁴⁰ Luke 4:10,11

¹⁴¹ Mark 2:1

what Luke recounts here happened on the next Sabbath, or whether some time elapsed in between is not clear. We get the impression that, although Jesus had performed some miracle in that town, He had not done any teaching.

Jesus' teaching differed greatly from the teaching of the rabbis in that He did not quote other authorities as the doctors of the law would do, but taught the people with authority. We find some examples of what is meant here in *The Sermon on the Mount*. We read there that He said: 'You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.'¹⁴² And: 'You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.'¹⁴³ His preaching and teaching was that of the written Word of God by the Word of God who became flesh. It was the author reading His own works.

The following incident Luke describes gives new meaning to the term 'authority.' A demon-possessed man was in the synagogue and he began to scream as Jesus taught. The Greek text describes this man as being possessed by the spirit of an unclean devil. The Greek word used is *akathartos*. It is the word that usually describes the satanic character of a spirit that makes a person immoral or even ceremonially unclean.

The demon in this man recognized Jesus for who He was. There may have been an attempt by this demon to remain in the man by making some kind of propaganda for Jesus. Luke, Paul and Silas would later encounter a similar situation while in Philippi. We read: 'Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.' She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the spirit left her.'¹⁴⁴ Demonic advertisement of God's truth has never led anyone to salvation.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: 'In the ancient world it was widely held that many troubles are caused by evil spirits. The Bible says little about demon possession before or after the incarnation, but much during Jesus' ministry. In Scripture this phenomenon is part of the conflict between Jesus, who came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), and evil ... On this occasion the demoniac 'shrieked at the top of his voice' (NEB). *Have you come to destroy us?* Is usually take as a question, but it might be a statement, 'You have come ...'. The demon recognized the opposition between Jesus and all of his kind. *The Holy One of God* (elsewhere only Mark 1:24; John 6:69) is an unusual title, stressing the thought of consecration to God's service. In this place we should see it as an example of what James had in mind when he wrote 'the demons believe – and shudder' (Jas 2:19).'

Evidently, Capernaum was a center of demonic activity. If we look at Daniel's statements about territorial evil spirits,¹⁴⁵ we may assume that a powerful spirit had made Capernaum his headquarters. Matthew observes about Jesus' moving to Capernaum: 'Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 'Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.'¹⁴⁶ This would explain why the demon in the man who came to the synagogue, which was evidently a single spirit, said: 'Have you come to destroy us?'

¹⁴² Matt. 5:21,22

¹⁴³ Matt. 5:27-30

¹⁴⁴ Acts 16:16-18

¹⁴⁵ Dan. 10:13,20

¹⁴⁶ Matt. 4:13-16

Ordering the demon in the man to be quiet, Jesus exorcised the spirit and set the man free. This made the people in the synagogue realize that Jesus was, in fact, the Holy One of God. Word about Jesus' authority was not only spread among the people in the area, but also among the evil spirits.

2. Peter's mother-in-law 4:38-39

38 *Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her.*

39 *So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.*

Matthew and Mark also report the incident about the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Matthew states: 'He touched her hand and the fever left her.'¹⁴⁷ Mark reports: 'So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.'¹⁴⁸ Only Luke reports that Jesus rebuked the fever. Luke also mentions that it was a high fever. The beloved physician had no doubt tried to determine what sickness caused the fever, but, being only able to do his research among laypeople, he could not come to a conclusion.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: 'This abrupt mention of Peter (Simon) for the first time, without any explanatory notice, tells us that when St. Luke wrote his Gospel Peter was well known and honored in all the Churches. ... The epithet 'great,' applied to the fever, was a well-known technical term; it was used by Galen of fevers. There are several expressions in this Gospel which remind us that the author was a trained physician.'

Mark also mentions that there were other disciples with Jesus. We read: 'As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew.'¹⁴⁹

3. Many healings 4:40-41

40 *When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.*

41 *Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ.*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: 'The end of the day saw *any that were sick with various diseases* brought to Jesus. They could not be carried on the sabbath, but with its end at sundown people lost no time. There is a personal touch in that Jesus *laid his hands on every one of them as he healed them* (an unusual procedure among the Jews, not found in the Old Testament nor in rabbinic literature, though attested in one passage in the Dead Sea scrolls). Luke is the only one to tell us this and also that the demons who were expelled cried out, *You are the Son of God!* The Galileans may have thought Jesus no more than a man, but the evil ones did not make that mistake. Mark shares the information that Jesus did not allow them to speak, but not that Jesus rebuked them (cf. 4:35, 39). Jesus did not countenance evil. It is interesting that Luke tells us that thus early the demons recognized *that he was the Christ*. It took the disciples a long time to learn this lesson. The refusal to allow the demons to disclose that Jesus was the Christ was perhaps to forestall nationalistic Messianic movements. Popular enthusiasm would have made a rebel hero out of any messiah! In any case the Evangelists hold that people should come to see Jesus for what he is on account of his words and his deeds, not on account of the testimony of demons.'

Matthew saw a deeper meaning in what Jesus did on this historic evening. We read: 'This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.'¹⁵⁰ That quotation is from Isaiah 53:4a. The context in Isaiah is the prophecy about Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. Jesus literally took the infirmities and diseases of these people upon Himself and paid the price of their healing and freedom.

¹⁴⁷ Matt. 8:14

¹⁴⁸ Mark 1:31

¹⁴⁹ Mark 1:29

¹⁵⁰ Matt. 8:17

C. A preaching tour 4:42-44

42 At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them.

43 But he said, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.'

44 And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

We have the impression that the mass-healing of the previous verses went on till late at night. It may have lasted till the crack of dawn. After having laid His hands on every sick person, Jesus probably escaped from view under the cover of darkness. We don't know how Jesus Himself reacted physically to these healings. In a later incident when the woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, touched Jesus' cloak, Luke reports that Jesus knew that power has gone out from Him.¹⁵¹ We assume, therefore, that Jesus felt spiritually and physically exhausted at the end of this long healing session. He needed rest and spiritual refreshing. Mark, reporting on the same meeting, states that Jesus went to a solitaire place to pray.¹⁵² He also mentions that Jesus left the house, meaning that He had not spent the whole night in the open. We also learn from Mark that it was Peter who reported to Jesus that the people were looking for Him.

We see a situation similar to the one after Jesus had performed the miracle of the feeding of a crowd of over five thousand people, that they wanted Him to stay, believing that He would be the solution to their daily need for food. Here the people were looking for the Man who could keep them in good health.

But the important part of Jesus' ministry was not the physical healings and casting out of demons, but the message of salvation, 'the good news of the kingdom of God.'

D. Jesus' miracles 5:1-26

1. The miraculous catch of fish 5:1-11

1 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God,

2 he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.

3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.'

5 Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.'

6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

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

9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken,

10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.'

11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

¹⁵¹ Luke 8:46

¹⁵² Mark 1:35

The scene is the Lake of Gennesaret, which is the name Luke gives to the body of water that is also called Sea of Galilee, or Sea of Tiberias. According to Leon Morris, in *Luke*, ‘It measures roughly 13 miles by 7 miles and is situated about 700 feet below sea-level.’ Capernaum was situated on the northern shore of the lake, where the Jordan River feeds into it.

It is difficult to determine where this story fits in the calling of the disciples. John tells us that Andrew and, supposedly he himself (he does not mention his own name in his Gospel), were disciples of John the Baptist and began to follow Jesus when John pointed Him out as ‘the Lamb of God.’ Andrew contacted Simon, his brother and brought him to Jesus, who changed his name to Cephas, or Peter.¹⁵³ We assume that these young men returned to their job after their first encounter with Jesus. Luke’s story of the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, about which we read in the previous chapter, indicates that there was occasional contact between Jesus and some of the disciples. From the story of the miraculous catch of fish, however, we conclude that there had not yet been a point at which the disciples left everything to follow Jesus.

Jesus’ teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum and the exorcism of demons in the area had firmly established His reputation. By this time the crowd had grown to the point where a synagogue could no longer contain them and, consequently, the meetings were held in the open.

Luke states that the people were crowding around Jesus, probably to the point where He was being pushed into the water. That is when Jesus decided to climb into one of the boats, where He could sit down and teach. Since the boat was pushed off a little distance from the shore, it was turned into a pulpit from which Jesus could see the crowd and they saw Him and His voice would carry far enough to be heard by all.

We don’t know how long Jesus spoke, but at one point, at the end of His sermon, He told Peter to go to a place where the water was deep and to let down his net. Here the story becomes interesting, as Peter acts as a professional fisherman, lecturing a carpenter about the art of fishing. Peter and his colleagues had fished all night and caught nothing. They must have attributed this to the season or the current and they had given up. When Peter puts down the net at Jesus’ request, he probably had the attitude of one who was going to prove that Jesus was wrong and he was right. There must have been some professional pride in Peter’s heart.

Luke uses the Greek word *epistates*, “Master.” His is the only Gospel in which this word is used for addressing Jesus. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* observes: ‘It is used by the disciples in addressing the Lord, in recognition of His authority rather than His instruction.’ In this particular case there may have been a touch of irony in Luke’s choice of the word, although Peter, obviously, did not speak Greek.

At this point Luke switches to ‘they,’ indicating that Peter was not the only one who let down his net. The fact that both boats were filled with fish to the point where they began to sink is indication that this was a common effort and the results were extraordinary in more than one way.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “Obedience brings results! Peter and his friends let down the nets and enclosed a great shoal of fish. There were too many for the nets to hold. Even when the fishermen signaled to their partners in the other boat and they too came up, there was still not the necessary capacity. They filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. The number of fish is not given (as it is in the story of John), but clearly the catch was abnormal. It was not to be explained along the usual lines of fishing techniques.”

It was not, however, the extravagance of the catch only that brought Peter to his knees with the exclamation: “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” Something snapped inside Peter. He saw his professional pride as sinful in the presence of this Man, whom he recognized as “the Holy One of God.” In performing this miracle, Jesus knocked the props out from under Peter’s life and made him realize that he had put his trust in his own abilities instead of in the grace of God. Peter, and the other disciples, needed this experience, in order to know that to be a fisher of men human efficiency is insufficient.

The Greek verb Luke uses in the phrase “from now on you will catch men,” is *zograo*, which literally means “to take alive,” or “to make a prisoner of war.” The only other time this verb is used is in the verse:

¹⁵³ See John 1:35-42.

“Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who *has taken them captive* to do his will.”¹⁵⁴ If we use fishing as a symbol of evangelism, we face the problem that a fish is caught to be eaten, that is it involves death, not life. In the Greek verb used in Luke’s text, the person caught for Christ is “taken alive” in the most positive sense of the word! *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes appropriately: “These fish are taken to be killed and fed on; but those who are converted under your ministry shall be preserved unto eternal life.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “The extraordinary nature of the catch astonished the fishermen: Peter, those with him and Peter’s *partners* (the word is difference from that in v. 7; Moffatt distinguishes with ‘mates’ and ‘partners’). Then Luke goes to the important thing, the sequel to the miracle. First, Jesus reassures Peter. *Do not be afraid* means ‘Stop being fearful’ rather than ‘Don’t get scared.’ It calms an existing fear. Peter was evidently awe-struck, as his whole reaction shows. *Henceforth* introduces a new set of circumstances. A turning-point has been reached. From now on things will be different with Peter. The nature of the new life to which Jesus is calling him comes out in the final words: *You will be catching men*. The tense is continuous, signifying a habitual practice. And Peter will no longer be concerned with fish but with people. *Catching* is, of course, used in a different sense, catching for life not for death ... When the fishing party got to land *they left everything* (cf. 18:28-30). They left the greatest catch they had seen in all their lives. That catch was not as important as what it showed them about Jesus, so they *followed him*. They became disciples in the fullest sense.”

It may be good to remember how, in the early church, the fish became symbol of the Christian faith. The Greek word *ichthus* became an anagram for the Greek words “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.”

It was at this point that Peter, John and James left everything to become Jesus’ disciples, who followed Him wherever He went.

2. Healing a leper 5:12-16

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

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

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

15 *Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.*

16 *But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

Luke does not give any indication where this healing of a leper took place. We don’t learn either how much time elapse between the previous story and this one. As a physician, Luke must have been particularly interested in the eye-witness reports of people being healed by Jesus. The Greek text is actually more vivid than our English translation. V.12 reads literally: “And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man who full of leprosy: seeing Jesus fell on his face, [and] besought him, saying, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”

We find the report of the healing of this leper also in the other two synoptic Gospels.¹⁵⁵ Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes about the sickness: “*Leprosy* in biblical times was the name given to a variety of diseases, some curable and some not. In its worst form it was a greatly dreaded and very dreadful disease. It was both disfiguring and fatal and the ancient world’s only defense against it was quarantine (Lev. 13:46). Sufferers were forbidden to approach other people, and to prevent accidental contact they were required to call out ‘Unclean’ (Lev. 13:45). They had no way of earning a living and had to depend on charity. The psychological effects of all this seem to have been as serious as the physical. People had (and often have)

¹⁵⁴ II Tim. 2:25,26

¹⁵⁵ Matt. 8:2-4; Mark 1:40,41

an attitude to leprosy different from that to any other disease. It was defiling. People were ashamed of it, though it was no fault of their own. Jesus healed lepers and saw in this one of the signs of his Messiah-ship (7:22).⁷

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia describes leprosy as follows: ‘A slowly progressing and intractable disease characterized by subcutaneous nodules, scabs or cuticular crusts and white shining spots appearing to be deeper than the skin. Other signs are (1) that the hairs of the affected part turn white and (2) that later there is a growth of ‘quick raw flesh.’ This disease in an especial manner rendered its victims unclean; even contact with a leper defiled whoever touched him, so while the cure of other diseases is called healing, that of leprosy is called cleansing (except in the case of Miriam (Num 12:13) and that of the Samaritan (Luke 17:15) where the word ‘heal’ is used in reference to leprosy).”

The leper who came to Jesus had no doubt about Jesus’ power to heal, but he was not sure about Jesus’ willingness to do so. He may have thought that, since everyone he knew dreaded his condition and would not even be willing to come close to him, Jesus may not have wanted to touch him either. In Mark’s version, we read: ‘Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’”¹⁵⁶ Healing was instantaneous. Being sinless, Jesus was not defiled by the touch; His holy touch cleansed the sinful person!

Jesus command to the man, not to tell anybody, but to go at once to the priest, was meant to be a testimony to the priests. The Levitical law had an elaborate ceremony of cleansing of lepers,¹⁵⁷ which was probably never observed, since the sickness, in most cases was considered incurable. The law involved the sacrifice to two birds, one of which was killed and the blood was poured out over a clay pot with fresh water in which the second bird was dipped and let go to fly away. The ceremony was one of the most beautiful symbols of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Then the leper was cleansed by anointing him in the same fashion as a priest was inaugurated, by applying a mixture of blood and oil to the right earlobe, the right thumb, and the toe of the right foot of the man. The whole ceremony was full of spiritual significance.

It appears that the healed leper never obeyed Jesus, because we read in Mark: “Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places.”¹⁵⁸ The man’s healing ought to have been a glorious testimony to the priests; instead his disobedience became a hindrance to Jesus’ ministry.

3. Healing a paralytic 5:17-26

17 One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.

18 Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.

19 When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’

21 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, ‘Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’

22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, ‘Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?’

23 Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’

24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . .’ He said to the paralyzed man, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’

¹⁵⁶ Mark 1:41

¹⁵⁷ See Lev. 14:1-31.

¹⁵⁸ Mark 1: 45

25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, ‘We have seen remarkable things today.’

The incident is reported by the other synoptic Gospels,¹⁵⁹ but Luke adds some details that are not found elsewhere. One of the most striking ones is the statement: “And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.” We may have assumed that Jesus’ power to heal was a constant ability, undependable on outward circumstances. In one instance, in Nazareth, however, Matthew reports: “And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.”¹⁶⁰ Faith of the one receiving the healing was an important part of the healing process. Although we may assume that Jesus had the gift of healing, Luke’s statement makes us understand that the power to heal was the Father’s and that there were situations in which this power was not available.

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary states: “And the power of the Lord was to heal them ... It was mighty to heal them; it was exerted and put forth to heal them, to heal those whom he taught (we may understand it so), to heal their souls, to cure them of their spiritual diseases, and to give them a new life, a new nature. Note, Those who receive the word of Christ in faith will find a divine power going along with that word, to heal them; for Christ came with his comforts to heal the broken-hearted, ch. 4:18. The power of the Lord is present with the word, present to those that pray for it and submit to it, present to heal them. Or it may be meant (and so it is generally taken) of the healing of those who were diseased in body, who came to him for cures. Whenever there was occasion, Christ had not to seek for his power, it was present to heal.” Luke’s observation, surely adds to the mystery of the way God deals with us. It should keep us from becoming dogmatic about the issue of healing.

In this case, the power was there, and its effect was more than physical healing of a paralyzed man. The first striking incident in the story is the way the paraplegic was taken to Jesus. Jesus met with a diverse group of people in a private home. It was so packed that nobody could get in or out. The patient was totally paralyzed so he had to be carried. Matthew and Luke tell us that there were “some men.” Only Mark states that the sick person was carried by four of them.¹⁶¹ When they saw that it would be impossible to get their friend to Jesus by taking him through the door, they climbed the roof and took away some of the tiles to let their friend down before Jesus’ feet. From this we learn that houses in Israel then were different from the ones we know in the West. Roofs were flat and tiles could be removed without causing permanent damage to the building.

So the paraplegic, lying on his mat, landed right in front of Jesus’ feet. It is obvious that the intent was physical healing, but that is not the issue Jesus addresses first. Jesus sees the faith, not only of the sick person, but also of the four friends who took extraordinary measures to bring him. That is what caused Him to say: “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” The Greek text reads literally: “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” The Greek verb *aféontai* is in a passive perfect mode. It is something done to the man and it has a lasting effect.

Whether this means that the man’s paralysis had been the result of one specific sin he had committed, or of a sinful lifestyle, cannot be concluded from Jesus’ words. The obvious implication is that paralysis was not the man’s first and foremost problem. That was not what would have sent him to hell.

Jesus’ statement provokes an inaudible reaction from the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Luke merely states that they “began thinking to themselves, ‘Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’”

Strictly speaking it is not true that only God forgives sins. If people sin against us, it is up to us to forgive them. There is a relationship between our willingness to forgive our fellowmen and God’s forgiveness of our sins. Jesus says in *The Sermon on the Mount*: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your

¹⁵⁹ Matt. 9:1-7; Mark 2:1-12

¹⁶⁰ Matt. 13:58

¹⁶¹ Mark 2:3

Father will not forgive your sins.”¹⁶² And to His disciples, He said: “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”¹⁶³

The assumption of the Pharisees and teachers of the law in this case was probably that the man’s paralysis was the result of a sin he had committed against God. If Jesus, therefore, forgave this man’s sin, He acted as God.

Before setting straight the theologians present, Jesus shows them His prophetic knowledge of their unspoken thoughts. David wrote in one of his psalms: “O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.”¹⁶⁴ By saying to them: “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?” Jesus identifies Himself as the One to whom David addressed his psalm.

In the question, “what is easier, to forgive, or to heal,” Jesus reveals that those people were thinking it is easy to say: “You are forgiven” because forgiveness is not something that can be verified by the senses.

The most amazing part of the argument, however, is not in the fact that Jesus, supposedly, identifies Himself as God, but as Man. As “the Son of Man,” He says: “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . .” He said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

It was as the Son of Man that Jesus forgave sin and healed sickness. In using the term for Himself, Jesus identified Himself with the person Daniel saw in one of his visions. We read: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”¹⁶⁵ Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about the title: “This is Luke’s first use of the expression *the Son of man*, which he will use in all twenty-six times. It is Jesus’ favorite self-designation, being found in the Gospels over eighty times, and in all the strata that critics discern in all four Gospels. It is used only by Jesus (except for Stephen, Acts 7:56). It appears to be his way of referring to his Messiahship with the use of a term which would not arouse the wrong association in people’s minds. The Son of man, then, spoke the word of healing and told the paralytic to take up his bed and go home.”

It would be the use of this title Son of Man that would be the grounds for His death sentence at the trial, where we read: “The high priest said to him, ‘I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ ‘Yes, it is as you say,’ Jesus replied. ‘But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’”¹⁶⁶

From this court scene it would appear that the terms Son of God and Son of Man are interchangeable. It seems more logical to assume that Jesus used the title there specifically to establish a reference to Daniel’s vision. The first and foremost conclusion in the use of the title, however, seems to be that Jesus wanted Himself to be known as a genuine human being. The first time the title is used in Scripture it refers to God. We read: “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a *son of man*, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”¹⁶⁷ The Hebrew words there are *ben ‘adam*. In Daniel’s text the words are in Aramaic *bar ‘enash*.

¹⁶² Matt. 6:14,15

¹⁶³ Luke 17:3,4

¹⁶⁴ Ps. 139:1-4

¹⁶⁵ Dan. 7:13,14

¹⁶⁶ Matt. 26:63,64

¹⁶⁷ Num. 23:19

Jesus' use of the term establishes Him as a member of the human race. In being born into this world He became fully man. The Apostle Paul refers to Jesus as "the last Adam," and as "the second man,"¹⁶⁸ indicating that, in His death, Jesus brought closure to the sinful condition of the human race that descended from Adam and that, in His resurrection, He became the first of a new human race of redeemed people.

The question remains whether Jesus, as a human being, had the right to forgive sins committed to God? The first answer is 'yes,' because in His death on the cross He paid the penalty of sin for the whole human race. He died as Man, which was the only possibility to die, since God cannot die. Therefore, as a Man, He had the right to forgive. Another question is whether we, as human beings, members of the body of Christ, have the right to forgive sins that are not primarily offenses to our person. That mandate was entrusted to us, according to what Jesus said to His disciples after His resurrection: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."¹⁶⁹ We must assume that those to whom we extend this forgiveness demonstrate repentance and assurance of faith in the death of Jesus Christ as payment for their sins. Where this is not in evidence, forgiveness must be withheld.

Having said this, we look back at Jesus' question: "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" For Jesus it was not merely a matter of saying the words; He paid the price for what He said. The only reason Jesus could forgive this man's sins and all the sin of the whole world was by taking the punishment upon Himself. It was also on the basis of that payment that He could say to the man "Get up and walk!"

As Luke describes the reaction of the public that was amazed and praised God, we assume that the Pharisees and teachers of the law were not included.

E. The calling of Levi 5:27-32

27 After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, 28 and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

29 Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.

30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

31 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about the Roman method of collecting taxes: "The Roman system of farming out the taxing rights would have been in force, though the Romans had assigned the revenues in this area to Herod Antipas ... The taxes that Levi collected are likely to have been toll or customs duties rather than poll tax or the like. The tax collectors were heartily disliked both as collaborators and as extortioners. As a class they were regarded as dishonest and the Talmud classes them as robbers ... Jesus saw Levi and said no more than *Follow me*. Levi *left everything* (a detail only in Luke) *and followed him*. This must have meant a considerable sacrifice, for tax collectors were normally wealthy. Matthew must have been the richest of the apostles. We should not miss the quiet heroism in this. If following Jesus had not worked out for the fishermen, they could have returned to their trade without difficulty. But when Levi walked out of his job he was through. They would surely never take back a man who had simply abandoned his tax office. His following of Jesus was a final commitment."

Levi is the same person as Matthew and the story of this call is also mentioned in that Gospel, as well as in Mark.¹⁷⁰ *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes about Levi's occupation: "Taxes on goods transported along the caravan road were levied by Herod's agents, of whom Matthew may have been one."

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Levi's call: "Capernaum ... had become, owing to its situation, a commercial centre of no small importance. It was on the great highway from the interior of Asia, and from

¹⁶⁸ See I Cor. 15:45-49.

¹⁶⁹ John 20:22,23

¹⁷⁰ Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:14-17

Damascus to the seaboard Mediterranean cities, to Jerusalem, and to Egypt. The customhouse of Capernaum and the office of inland revenue there would naturally be under the control of officials of some importance. The local trade on the lake, too, we know at that period was very large. It has been frequently asked — what specially induced our Lord to select as one of his inner circle a man whose life-work was so hateful and unpopular to the Jewish people generally? Why did he include in the twelve one who, from the nature of his detested office, had lost religious caste among the Jews, and who was compelled to consort with sinners, Gentiles, and persons who were considered, either from their birth or life and associations, outside the pale of the chosen people? Various replies to this question have been suggested, such as — by this open act he threw down the gauntlet to all that powerful Pharisee class who were beginning to suspect and to mistake his teaching and liberalism. Or was his apparently strange choice dictated by a simple desire to have, in the inner circle of his devoted friends, a business man — one who could manage the affairs and regulate the economy of the little growing society? But this seems to have been done by Judas; or was it simply done in obedience to a sudden impulse from on High? None of these seems satisfactory. Surely another motive, and that a deeper and a nobler one, suggested this enrolment of the despised publican in that glorious company of apostles. The Lord was determined to show, by this choice of his, that in his eyes all callings were equally honorable, all ways of life might lead to the city of the blessed. Never would the work ennoble the man, but only the way in which the work was done. The Baptist, as we have seen, first taught this Divine liberalism. The Baptist's Lord placed his seal of approval upon his servant's teaching by such acts as the calling of Matthew the publican, and feasting in his house with publicans and sinners."

Levi's celebration party can be seen as an evangelistic effort to reach his former colleagues. Neither Matthew, nor Luke, give us any of the details of the inner transformation that must have occurred in Levi's heart at the moment of Jesus' call. He must have recognized Jesus as the Messiah, as the promised King of Israel. That is the way Jesus' is presented to us in Matthew's Gospel. We don't know if Levi had used his office as tax collector as a means of personal, illegal enrichment. That he did, is assumed by the fact that he was a tax collector for the Roman government. But even if he was not dishonest in his trade, he was despised as a collaborator with the enemy.

We have no record of Levi being among the tax collectors who approached John the Baptist and were told: "Don't collect any more than you are required to."¹⁷¹ But even if he had not heard John say so personally, he may have been aware of the advice and followed it in his own practice. The reason to assume that Levi was not dishonest is that we don't read about a confession of sin, similar to Zacchaeus' who said: "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."¹⁷²

Levi throws an extravagant party to celebrate his call, and probably to introduce his friends and colleagues to Christ. The celebration suggests that Jesus' words "follow Me" had evoked a spiritual crisis in Levi's heart, which made him a changed man. His change of heart had not immediately changed his lifestyle. We assume that, as Levi began to follow Jesus, the extravagance disappeared from his life. Changes of behavior are usually not instantaneous upon conversion. In his book *The Taste of New Wine*, the author Keith Miller writes that he celebrated his conversion by taking a swig of whisky!

We don't know in how far Jesus participated in the extravagance of Levi's celebration, but we do know that He accepted the invitation to attend. That fact evoked the criticism of the Pharisees and doctors of the law, who complained to Jesus' disciples that their Master was associating with tax collectors and sinners. What kind of sinners that last category belonged to is not explained. According to *The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, the Greek word *hamartooloi*, "sinners," is usually applied to Gentiles or pagans.

To this Jesus replied: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The statement is not only a revelation of God's grace for fallen man, but also a sharp criticism to those who considered themselves to enjoy spiritual good health and were not aware of their own condition of falling short of the glory of God. Those people did not know themselves, because they didn't know the character of God. Without consciousness of sin there can be no salvation.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Jesus' words: "This was one of those sayings of the Lord which sank very deep into the hearts of the hearers. All the three, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, repeat it with very

¹⁷¹ Luke 3:13

¹⁷² Luke 19:8

slight variations; it was evidently a favorite theme with the great first teachers who followed Christ. It has borne rich fruit in the Master's Church; for this vindication of Jesus of his conduct in going so often into the society of the moral waifs and strays of the population has been the real 'foundation of all those philanthropic movements which enlist the upper classes of society in the blessed work of bending down to meet in love the lower classes, so that the snapped circle of humanity may be restored; it is the philosophy in a nutshell of all home and missionary operations.'"

F. Fasting 5:33-39

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

34 Jesus answered, "Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?"

35 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."

36 He told them this parable: "No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old."

37 And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined."

38 No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins."

39 And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.'"

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The practice of fasting among the Jews was as follows: In the Law of Moses only one appointed fast in the year was enjoined — that on the sole Day of Atonement (... Leviticus 16:29; ... Numbers 29:7). After the Exile the *one* fast was increased to *four*. But the prophets gave no sanction to this added ritual (see ... Zechariah 7:1-12; 8:19). In the time of our Lord, rigid Jews used to fast twice a week (... Luke 18:12) — on Monday and Friday (the day on which, according to tradition, Moses went up Mount Sinai). It is evident that our Lord himself never observed or even approved of these fasts of the Pharisee sect."

In Luke's account, we get the impression that the question about fasting is asked by the Pharisees. In Mark's version, we only read "Some people came and asked Jesus ..."¹⁷³ Jesus never preached against fasting; He did warn against hypocrisy in fasting.¹⁷⁴ In the healing of the demon possessed boy, where the disciples had tried to exorcise the evil spirit, but failed, we read that Jesus answered their question: "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."¹⁷⁵ But there, the word "fasting" is lacking in most of the older manuscripts.

Jesus' answer to the question is most remarkable. He uses the term "bridegroom" which had been given to Him by John the Baptist, who called himself "the friend who attends the bridegroom."¹⁷⁶ The Apostle Paul uses the figure of the bride for the church of Christ, writing to the Corinthians: "I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him."¹⁷⁷ The image is fully developed in Revelation, where John calls the church "the bride."¹⁷⁸ Here, we assume that Jesus spoke about the nation of Israel as the bride and Himself as the Messiah.

The point is that His coming is a reason for celebration. He came to introduce "the year of the Lord's favor,"¹⁷⁹ which is the Year of Jubilee. Quoting Godet, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "'In the midst of this feast of publicans, the heart of Jesus is overflowing with joy; it is one of the hours when his earthly life seems to his feeling like a marriage-day. But suddenly his countenance becomes overcast: the shadow of a painful vision passes across his brow: 'The days will come,' ... said he, in a solemn tone. At the close of

¹⁷³ Mark 2:18

¹⁷⁴ Matt. 6:16-18

¹⁷⁵ Mark 9:29 - NKJV

¹⁷⁶ John 3:29

¹⁷⁷ II Cor. 11:2

¹⁷⁸ Rev. 19:7; 22:2,9

¹⁷⁹ Luke 4:19

this nuptial week, the Bridegroom himself will be suddenly smitten and cut off; then will come the time of fasting for those who today are rejoicing; there will be no necessity to enjoin it. In this striking and poetic answer Jesus evidently announces his violent death.’ The imagery of the bridegroom is drawn from ... Hosea 2:19, 20, and perhaps also from the more mystical Scripture, Psalm 45. and the Song of Songs. Jesus here clearly regards himself as the Christ, as identical with the long looked-for Divine Deliverer; but at this comparatively early stage of his public career he was fully conscious that in his Person, with the triumphant would be joined the suffering Messiah. The word rendered ‘shall be taken away from (them),’ *aparthè* only occurs here in the New Testament; it points evidently to a death of violence.”

The parable that follows consists of two illustrations, one of mending cloth and the other of storing wine. Both illustrations are also found in Matthew and Mark.¹⁸⁰ *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: “Patched garments were common in Palestine, because the people were poor. New cloth, sewed on an old garment, will shrink when washed, and so will pull apart the older and weaker cloth.” The poverty of the people was probably the result of the Roman occupation of the country and of the taxes levied on the population and the extortion practiced by members of the military.

Luke uses the Greek word *kainos*, “new” for the piece of cloth used as a patch; Matthew and Mark use the word *agnaphos*, “not shrunk.” There is a question as to the meaning of the parables. We could see them as representing the old covenant and the new. The new covenant is best defined in Jeremiah’s prophecy: “‘The time is coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord. ‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the Lord. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’”¹⁸¹

The point that is not mentioned in Jeremiah’s text is the way in which forgiveness of sin under the old covenant would differ from the way God forgives under the new. In both covenants forgiveness was granted by means of substitute sacrifices. In the old covenant the sacrifice was an animal, in the new it is the body of Christ. That is for us “the cloth” that covers us. That cover must not be “mended” by taking elements of the image in order to apply it to the reality.

The parable of the cloth speaks of covering, of the essence of what God does for us in forgiving our sins. The image of the wine speaks of the experience, the enjoyment of forgiveness. The storage of wine in animal skins is foreign to us. The new wine was the wine that was still in the process of fermenting. To put that kind of wine into skins that had lost their elasticity would make them burst. *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “Wine increases its strength and flavor, and its mildness and mellowness, by age, and the old is therefore preferable. They who had tasted such mild and mellow wine would not readily drink the comparatively sour and astringent juice of the grape as it came from the press. The meaning of this proverb in this place seems to be this: You Pharisees wish to draw my disciples to the ‘austere’ and ‘rigid’ duties of the ceremonial law-to fasting and painful rites; but they have come under a milder system. They have tasted the gentle and tender blessings of the gospel; they have no ‘relish’ for your stern and harsh requirements. To insist now on their observing them would be like telling a man who had tasted of good, ripe, and mild wine to partake of that which is sour and unpalatable. At the proper time all the sterner duties of religion will be properly regarded; but ‘at present,’ to teach them to fast when they see ‘no occasion’ for it-when they are full of joy at the presence of their Master-would be like putting a piece of new cloth on an old garment, or new wine into old bottles, or drinking unpleasant wine after one had tasted that which was more pleasant. It would be ill-timed, inappropriate, and incongruous.”

Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers who includes Jesus’ closing remark “And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: “St. Luke alone of the first three evangelists who related in detail this most important reply of Jesus when the disciples of John and the Pharisees came to question him, adds this curious simile. The meaning

¹⁸⁰ Matt. 9:16,17; Mark 2:21,22

¹⁸¹ Jer. 31:31-34

of the parable-pictures of the new patch being sewn on an old garment, and of new wine being poured into worn-out, decaying wine-skins, was very plain. Pitilessly severe it would ring in the ears of men brought up in the old rabbinic Jewish schools. The two first evangelists, conscious of the truth of their Master's words, were content to leave the stern teaching, which pronounced the old state of things among the religious Jews as utterly worn-out, in all its naked severity. But Paul, under whose guidance we believe Luke wrote his Gospel, with that tender and considerate love which so beautifies the earnest and impassioned nature of the apostle of the Gentiles, knew that Jesus had added a few words to the two seemingly harsh parables; these he bade Luke carefully insert in his narrative. They contain what may be termed an almost playful apology for the slowness and reluctance of the men trained in the rabbinic schools, or even of the pupils of John the Baptist, to accept the new, broad, generous view of truth which he (Jesus) was putting forth — it was an apology for a slowness and reluctance, shading too often into unveiled dislike and open hostility. (What experience Paul and Luke must have had of this hostility!) The Master, in his Divine wisdom, knew how hard it was to forsake long-cherished prejudices. Time must be given, allowance must be made, harsh judgment must be deprecated. These men, trained in the old system, are here compared to guests who, after the banquet, are suddenly asked to change the old wine, mellowed by age, of which they have been drinking, for new sweet wine. This new wine seems, in those days, generally to have been considered preferable, but to men who had been drinking the old, age-softened vintage, the new would seem fiery and even harsh. The Greek word rendered in the Authorized Version 'better,' in the older authorities is positive instead of comparative. The translation should therefore run, 'the old is good.' The argument would be the same: Why change what we have been drinking for something new? Surely the old wine is good? Such passages as ... Nehemiah 10:35; ... Proverbs 3:10; ... Hosea 4:11; ... Haggai 1:11, bear out the above statement, that in those days, among the Jews of Syria, Palestine, and the adjacent countries, new sweet wine was a favorite beverage among wine-drinkers."

G. The right use of the sabbath 6:1-11

1. Lord of the sabbath 6:1-5

1 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels.

2 Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

3 Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?"

4 He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

5 Then Jesus said to them, "The Son Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

In introducing this section, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: "All four Gospels make it clear that a chief point in the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities concerned the right way to keep the sabbath. The Jews took the sabbath seriously (a whole tractate in the Mishnah is given up to it). Many students of the rabbinics hold that the sabbath was a delight, but the rules for keeping it were certainly elaborate and repressive. The interesting thing about Jesus' approach is that he did not simply argue that repressive regulations would be relaxed and a more liberal attitude adopted, he said that his opponents had missed the whole point of this holy day. Had they understood it they would have seen that deeds of mercy like his were not merely permitted – they were obligatory (cf. John 7:23f.)."

The same incident Luke reports here is also described by Matthew and Mark¹⁸² with some slight differences. Matthew adds another example Jesus gives besides David's transgression, that is that the priests in the temple break the Sabbath by working on that day. And both add what Luke omits: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

Our tendency, in looking at what the disciples were doing, (picking a few ears of wheat and putting the grain in their mouths) would be that their actions could hardly be qualified as "working on the Sabbath."

¹⁸² Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-17

But in His reply to the Pharisees' accusation, that is not the line of defense Jesus takes here. Jesus' reply contains an admission that what the disciples were doing was, in fact, unlawful; they did break the Sabbath.

Using David's eating of the consecrated bread as an example, which was unlawful, emphasizes that what makes it lawful is not the act but the person who commits the act. The incident referred to is found in I Sam. 21:1-6. In that story there are several points that raise questions of inappropriate behavior. David and his men not only ate what they ought not to have eaten, David also lied to the priest Ahimelech by saying that he was on a secret mission for King Saul, while in reality he was fleeing from Saul. As a result, the whole priestly family of Nob was massacred by Saul. David would later say to Ahimelech's son, Ahitub, who was the only one to escape Saul's dastardly act, "I am responsible for the death of your father's whole family."¹⁸³

What Jesus says is not that certain persons can commit crimes, but it does not matter, because their status in life allows them to do what no one else may do. A Greek proverb reads: "The ox is not allowed to do what is allowed to Jupiter." That is not what Jesus is saying. Jesus' message to the Pharisees is rather based on David's word to Ahitub; He takes responsibility for the disciples' breaking of the Sabbath, by taking upon Himself the death sentence that was theirs. That is what makes Jesus for us "Lord of the Sabbath." He paid the price that allows us to enter into God's Sabbath. It is obvious that the Pharisees could have no idea what Jesus was talking about.

Looking at the story, we would conclude that what the disciples did, ought to be considered a little sin, not a big one. Jesus' handling of the situation proves that little sins and big sins all lead to the cross where He died.

2. Healing the withered hand 6:6-11

6 On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled.

7 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.

8 But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there.

9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"

10 He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored.

11 But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

This story is also found in the other two synoptic Gospels.¹⁸⁴ Luke does not indicate at what town this healing in the synagogue occurred. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that it may have been Capernaum.

One of the bothersome features in the story is the reason the Pharisees and teachers of the law went to the synagogue that particular Sabbath; it was not to worship God, but to spy on Jesus. Luke states clearly that they "were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus." They were helped by the fact that there was a man with a shriveled hand in the congregation. The Greek word used for "shriveled" is *xeros*, which expresses the idea of dry as opposed to wet. The same word is used in the verse where Jesus, on His way to the cross, answers the weeping women of Jerusalem: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is *dry*?"¹⁸⁵ It also occurs in: "By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on *dry land*; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned."¹⁸⁶ Leon Morris, in

¹⁸³ I Sam. 22:22

¹⁸⁴ Matt. 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6

¹⁸⁵ Luke 23:28-31

¹⁸⁶ Heb. 11:29

Luke, writes: “*Withered* is a word used of plants or dried wood. Here it seems to mean some form of muscular atrophy.”

In describing the man’s condition, Luke’s professional background shines through. He is the only one of the Gospel writers who indicates that it was the man’s right hand.

Jesus was aware of the hostile attitude of the Pharisees and doctors of the law, so He addressed them before healing the man’s hand. Here the three synoptic accounts differ. Luke reports Jesus’ question as: “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?” According to Mark, Jesus said: “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” Matthew, who is the only reporter who was present at the incident, states that the Pharisees asked the question: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” And Jesus counters with: “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” According to Mark, “they remained silent.” Mark adds a deeply emotional note: “He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’”

Whatever the exact wording of the interchange, it was obvious that Jesus’ healing of the man’s hand was more lawful than what the Pharisees and teachers of the law were doing on the Sabbath. Mark reports that “the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.”¹⁸⁷ To plot murder on any day of the week would be unlawful!

Jesus commands the man to stretch out his shriveled hand. This was exactly what he had been unable to do. But Jesus’ word was creative, as the Word of God always is; it enabled the man to do what he had been unable to do.

The healing had its effect upon the Pharisees and the masters of the law. Our text reads: “they were furious.” The Greek text reads literally: “They were filled with madness,” using the word *anoia*, “stupidity,” or “rage.” Paul uses the same word in the verse in which he speaks about “men of depraved minds.” We read: “Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth — men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their *folly* will be clear to everyone.”¹⁸⁸

H. Choosing the Twelve 6:12-16

12 *One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.*

13 *When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles:*

14 *Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew,*

15 *Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot,*

16 *Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*

Barnes’ Notes observes about Jesus spending the night in prayer: “There has been a difference of opinion about this passage, whether it means that he spent the night in the act of ‘praying’ to God, or in a ‘place’ of prayer. The Jews had places of prayer, called ‘oratories,’ built out of their cities or towns, where they could retire from the bustle of a city and hold communion with God. They were built on the banks of rivers (compare Acts 16:13), in groves, or on hills. They were rude enclosures, made by building a rough wall of stone around a level piece of ground, and capable of accommodating a small number who might resort thither to pray.” It seems logical to assume that Jesus went up a mountain in order to be alone. He may have withdrawn there as the sun was setting and spent the night in the dark, coming down again at dawn.

The occasion that prompted the all-night prayer meeting was the choice of a core group of disciples. Jesus wanted a small band of young men, probably about His own age, to accompany Him in His travels and to receive training as they went along. In order to make His choice, Jesus spent the night in prayer in

¹⁸⁷ Mark 3:6

¹⁸⁸ II Tim. 3:8,9

order to know the Father’s will. In doing this, He followed Solomon’s advice: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”¹⁸⁹ In this Jesus acted as perfect man, using human means and opportunities to understand the will of God. He is our example in the choices we must make in life.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “At daybreak Jesus *called his disciples*. This will be a group of people who had attached themselves loosely to him. A disciple was a learner, a student, but in the first century a student did not simply study a subject; he followed a teacher. There is an element of personal attachment in ‘disciple’ that is lacking in ‘student.’ From this larger number of adherents Jesus *chose ... twelve*. This is the number of the tribes of Israel, a number which indicates that Jesus was establishing the true Israel, the people of God. In Jesus and his followers ‘people could see a dramatization of the Old Testament picture of God bringing the twelve tribes of Israel to the promised land’ ... Jesus never set up an organization. These twelve men represent the total of his administrative machinery. Some of them were clearly outstanding men, but on the whole they seem to have been no more than average. Most have left very little mark on church history. Jesus preferred to work, then as now, through perfectly ordinary people.

These twelve Jesus *named apostles*. The term derives from the verb ‘to send’ and means ‘someone sent,’ ‘a messenger.’ Luke uses it six times (with twenty-eight more in Acts), whereas each of the other Evangelists has it once only (Mark may have it twice, depending on the solution to a textual problem). In the Gospels the group is usually referred to simply as ‘the twelve.’ Mark explains that Jesus chose them ‘to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons’ (Mark 3:14f.). This brings out the notion of mission and the centrality of preaching in their function.”

It is not clear at what point Jesus chose the twelve to become His inner circle. Mark is the only other Gospel writer who reports the incident.¹⁹⁰ In John’s Gospel we read that some of the ones that are listed here had an encounter with Jesus earlier on. Andrew and John were probably the first ones, followed by Peter, Philip and Nathanael.¹⁹¹ Luke reported in the previous chapter that Peter, James and John had left everything and followed Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish. We assume that all of these men were among the larger group from which Jesus chose the twelve.

The mystery in this choice, which was made with the help of the Father’s guidance, is the person of “Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.” In the light of the fact that Jesus’ choice of Judas Iscariot was based on the Father’s guidance, the question arises whether Jesus knew whom He was choosing.

The impression we get is that Jesus, at one point in His ministry, became aware of the role Judas was going to play in the reason for His coming to earth, which was “to give his life as a ransom for many.”¹⁹² We can only make such observations if we understand that Jesus, while on earth did not use His divine attributes of omniscience. We believe that God’s eternal attributes cannot be separated from each other. If He were omniscient, He would also be omnipresent. And it is obvious that the Man Jesus Christ could only be at one place at the time. We believe that in the incarnation He “gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.”¹⁹³ As a human being, Jesus had the gift of prophecy and many other spiritual gifts that had also been given to some of the Old Testament prophets. Those gifts were not used as a demonstration of His divinity, but of His humanity.

So, we believe that when Jesus chose Judas Iscariot, He did not know who Judas was and what role he would play. At one point as time went on, Jesus must have become more and more aware of the fact that Judas would be the man who was prefigured in the Old Testament in the person of Ahithophel and Doeg, who played such a negative role in David’s life.¹⁹⁴

We also assume that Judas did not initially realize where his negative choices in life would lead him. It may be difficult for us to understand how he could be for several years in intimate contact with Jesus and not be deeply affected by His teaching, lifestyle, and His fellowship with the Father. But as John’s love for

¹⁸⁹ Prov. 3:5,6

¹⁹⁰ Mark 3:13-19

¹⁹¹ See John 1:37-51.

¹⁹² Matt. 20:28

¹⁹³ Phil. 2:7 - *New Living Translation*

¹⁹⁴ II Sam. 17:23; Ps. 52:1

Jesus grew deeper over the years, Judas' grew colder. He became blatantly dishonest, helping himself to money from the cashbox to which he had the key, and maintaining a façade of piety at the same time. He may have thought that Jesus was the Messiah, but that He was wrong in the way He interpreted the role the Father had given Him. There was obvious demonic influence in Judas' life, but he did not become demon possessed until the moment he accepted the piece of bread Jesus handed to him at the Passover celebration. We read: "As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him."¹⁹⁵

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia writes about Judas Iscariot: "For any definite allusion to Judas during the interval lying between his call and the events immediately preceding the betrayal, we are indebted to John alone. These allusions are made with the manifest purpose of showing forth the nefarious character of Judas from the beginning; and in their sequence there is a gradual development and growing clearness in the manner in which Jesus makes prophecy regarding his future betrayer. Thus, after the discourse on the Bread of Life in the synagogue of Capernaum (John 6:26-59), when many of the disciples deserted Jesus (verse 66) and Peter protested the allegiance of the apostles (verse 69), Jesus answered, 'Did not I choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil' (verse 70). Then follows John's commentary, 'Now he spake of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve' (verse 71), implying that Judas was already known to Jesus as being in spirit one of those who 'went back, and walked no more with him' (verse 66). But the situation, however disquieting it must have been to the ambitious designs which probably actuated Judas in his acceptance of the apostleship ... was not sufficiently critical to call for immediate desertion on his part. Instead, he lulled his fears of exposure by the fact that he was not mentioned by name, and continued ostensibly one of the faithful. Personal motives of a sordid nature had also influence in causing him to remain. Appointed keeper of the purse, he disregarded the warnings of Jesus concerning greed and hypocrisy (compare Matt 6:20; Luke 12:1-3) and appropriated the funds to his own use. As a cloak to his avarice, he pretended to be zealous in their administration, and therefore, at the anointing of Jesus' feet by Mary, he asked 'Why was not this ointment sold for 300 shillings, and given to the poor? Now this he said, not because he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and having the bag took away what was put therein' (John 12:5-6; compare also Matt 26:7-13; Mark 14:3-8)."

I. The sermon on the plain 6:17-49

In introducing this section, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: "Matthew gives three chapters to the sermon on the mount. Luke's sermon 'on a level place' has many parallels, but is much shorter. However, in addition he has much similar matter scattered through his Gospel. Many feel that the same sermon lies behind both accounts, and they usually hold that Matthew has supplemented it by bringing together material from a variety of Q contexts. This is possible, but the differences are many. Preachers usually make use of the same or different matter in different sermons, especially if they speak without written script. This habit of preachers seems a better explanation of the combination of resemblances and differences than extensive editorial activity.

This sermon begins with the beatitudes and the woes, and goes on to the kind of conduct appropriate to those in the kingdom, with special stress on love and on the importance of not judging others. The principle that the tree is known by its fruit is brought to that of a man building a house. Throughout we are reminded of what it means to be a disciple: it is more than fine words, it is a whole way of life."

Matthew's wrote his Gospel in the same way as he had kept his financial records as a tax collector, putting items of the same category together. As such his version of Jesus' sermon may look slightly different from Luke's but may yet be the same sermon. Matthew had the advantage of being part of the audience; Luke received his information second hand. But there is little point in arguing whether we are looking at the same sermon or whether Jesus used some of His material more than once at different occasions.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The plan or scheme of the two Gospels was not the same. St. Luke, doubtless, had before him, when he compiled his work, copious notes or memoranda of the famous discourse. He evidently selected such small portions of it as fell in with his design. The two discourses reported by Matthew and Luke have besides many striking resemblances — both beginning with the

¹⁹⁵ John 13:27

beatitudes, both concluding with the same simile or parable of the two buildings, both immediately succeeded by the same miracle, the healing of the centurion's servant. It is scarcely possible — when these points are taken into consideration — to suppose that the reports are of two distinct discourses. The theory held by some scholars, that the great sermon was delivered twice on the same day, on the hillside to a smaller and more selected auditory, then on the plain below to the multitude in a shorter form, is in the highest degree improbable.

No portion of the public teaching of the Lord seems to have made so deep an impression as the mount-sermon. St. James, the so-called brother of Jesus, the first president of the Jerusalem Church, repeatedly quotes it in his Epistle. It was evidently the groundwork of his teaching in the first days. Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Polycarp, the nameless author of the recently found 'Teaching of the Apostles,' whose writings represent to us most of the Christian literature which we possess of the first century after the death of St. Paul, quote it often. It may be taken, indeed, as the pattern discourse which mirrors better and more fully than any other portion of the Gospels the Lord's teaching concerning the life he would have his followers lead.

It is not easy to give a *précis* of such a report as that of St. Luke, necessarily brief, and yet containing, we feel, many of the words, and even sentences, in the very form in which the Lord spoke them. What we possess here is, perhaps, little more itself than a summary of the great original discourse to which the disciples and the people listened."

1. The multitude 6:17-19

17 He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon,

18 who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured,

19 and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

Luke starts out by describing Jesus' audience, a certain number of Jesus' disciples, which may mean the twelve and several of those who had followed Jesus but had not been chosen to be part of the inner circle. Besides a great number of Jews there were people from Tyre and Sidon. Luke makes sure to mention that the sick were healed at this time. Luke particularly reports that the people tried to touch Jesus, because that by itself released the power of healing. Matthew also mentions healings, but he keeps that part of the story separated from Jesus' actual preaching.

2. The beatitudes 6:20-23

20 Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

22 Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

23 "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

One of the great differences between Matthew's version of the beatitudes and Luke's is that in Matthew the beatitudes have a spiritual connotation, which seems to be lacking in Luke's version. "The poor in spirit," in Matthew, simply become "you who are poor" in Luke's version. The same difference is even more observable in Matthew's "hunger and thirst for righteousness,"¹⁹⁶ which Luke reports as merely "you who are hungry," making it sound as a physical matter instead of a spiritual one. From those who mourn or weep, Luke moves to the end of the beatitudes, leaving out Matthew's mention of the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart and the peacemakers.

¹⁹⁶ Matt. 5:6

3. The woes 6:24-26

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

25 *Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.*

26 *Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.*

This part of the sermon is not found in Matthew’s record, which does not mean that Luke added words that Jesus did not speak. Some Bible scholars believe that these woes were particularly addressed to the Pharisees and doctors of the law. But they were not the only ones who were rich in Israel in Jesus’ days. As a matter of fact, some of those may not have been wealthy at all. In a parable Luke records later on in his Gospel, he tells the story of a rich man who made plans to store his bumper crop in larger storage buildings, but who died the next day. Jesus comments there: “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”¹⁹⁷

Being rich is in itself not a sinful condition, but it brings dangers and temptations with it that the poor do not have. Paul issued several warning in his letter to Timothy, saying: “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” And: “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”¹⁹⁸ The danger is not money, but the love of money. The Scottish writer George MacDonald has said that God punishes some people by making them rich.

4. Love 6:27-36

27 *“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,*

28 *bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

29 *If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.*

30 *Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.*

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

32 *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them.*

33 *And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that.*

34 *And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full.*

35 *But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.*

36 *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

In introducing this section, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “The heart of this sermon is the need for love. Jesus stresses that his followers must love the unlovely as well as those that appeal to them. There were several words for ‘love’ in Greek. Jesus was not asking for *storgē*, natural affection, nor for *erós*, romantic love, nor for *philia*, the love of friendship. He was speaking of *agapē*, which means love even of the unlovely, love which is not drawn out by merit in the beloved but which proceeds from the fact that the lover chooses to be a loving person.”

¹⁹⁷ Luke 12:21

¹⁹⁸ I Tim. 6:9,10, 17-19

Everything Jesus recommends in these verses goes against the grain of human nature. An enemy is someone who hates and it is natural for man to respond to hate with hate. In order to be able to respond to hate with love one needs the help of the Holy Spirit. After World War Two ended, Corrie ten Boom, who had been in a Nazi concentration camp with her sister, who died there, went back to Germany and spoke to the camp guards who had been sadists who treated the inmate cruelly. She presented them with the love of Christ.

Paul writes in Romans: “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”¹⁹⁹

And Peter writes: “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”²⁰⁰

Not only as He died on the cross, but during His whole life on earth as Man, Jesus practiced what He preached here in demonstrating love to those who hated Him and were out to kill Him. He did turn the other cheek and He allowed the Roman soldiers to take His clothes and gamble over them. A Flemish priest and poet, Guido Gezelle, wrote: “All rights denied, naked Christ died.” No one has ever lived up to that example!

The key Jesus leaves us is simple: “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” The Greek text reads literally: “And as you would that men do to you, do [you also] likewise to them.”

5. Judging other people 6:37-42

37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

39 He also told them this parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?

40 A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

41 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

42 How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

The exhortation is not against judging in general, but against being judgmental. There is a modern tendency that holds that ethics belong exclusively to the domain of private interpretation. That philosophy is preached as a blanket that is supposed to cover all human behavior. Someone’s lifestyle is his own business and others are not supposed to have opinions about that. Yet, we all know that some lifestyles are harmful, not only to the individual who practices them but to others also. It may not hurt society as a whole when a person says he is “gay” but if a person claims to have the right to abort a baby, it involves the life of another person, even though the fetus is unborn. What Jesus says here is not that we ought to turn a blind eye to practices that kill or corrupt others, but that we must realize that we possess a sinful nature, the same as the person who commits a crime. We must condemn a thief or a murderer, knowing that, for the grace of God, we would be the same.

The warning is more against prejudice than against judging. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments: “This is one of the most important exhortations in the whole of this excellent sermon. By a secret and criminal disposition of nature, man endeavors to elevate himself above others, and to do it more effectually, depresses them. His jealous and envious heart wishes that there may be no good quality found but in

¹⁹⁹ Rom. 5:6-8

²⁰⁰ I Peter 2:21,23,24

himself, that he alone may be esteemed. Such is the state of every unconverted man; and it is from this criminal disposition, that evil surmises, rash judgments, precipitate decisions, and all other unjust procedures against our neighbour, flow.”

The actual point of Jesus’ admonition is that judgment over others must be balanced by self-judgment. Prerequisite needed for judgment of others is self-knowledge, which in most people is rare and often non-existent. David’s prayer ought to be our own: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”²⁰¹

There are situations in life in which judgment is required. As a parent we have the responsibility to provide guidance for our children, which involves judgment. In the workplace, we may be called upon to check the quality of another person’s work and performance. A schoolteacher would not be able to do his job without judging his pupils’ work and attitude. But those are not the situation Jesus has in mind here.

V.37 does not only mention judgment, it also speaks of condemnation and forgiveness. The understanding is that we will be judged in the way we judge others. The condemnation we pronounce on others will be pronounced on us in the same manner. Forgiveness will be granted in the measure in which we grant it; that is where the catch is. It is that last act that Jesus emphasizes most. If we forgive, we demonstrate understanding about what God does for us. We demonstrate acceptance of the forgiveness of our own sin. Jesus does not mention the cross in this context, but we cannot interpret this section without it. We can only forgive as we have received forgiveness through the payment of our sins made by Him in His death. Only Christians can judge fairly, or at least they ought to be able to.

It is about forgiveness that Jesus says: “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” We must remember, however, that it was God who initiated the process of forgiveness. It is not that God waits to see how we are doing in forgiving others before He forgives us. It is on the basis of His forgiveness of our sins that we can judge others and proclaim forgiveness.

This exhortation is followed by three short parables: One about a blind person leading another blind one, the second about the pupil and his teacher and the last one about the speck of sawdust and the plank. All three are given in the context of forgiveness.

In the parable about the blind leading the blind, Jesus uses the example of physical blindness, which prevents a person to see where he is going. One requisite for leading the other is to see and know the way. In the application, sight becomes insight. One cannot teach someone else what one doesn’t understand oneself. This pertains particularly to the way of salvation. We must know to be saved in order to lead others to the Lord.

The parable of the speck of sawdust and the beam stands out as one of the more remarkable and vivid ones. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “Jesus rebukes hypocrisy with the illustration of the *speck* and the *log*, another illustration sometimes used by the rabbis. We should not overlook the fact that Jesus is quite ready to make his point in humorous vein. We are so often impressed with the solemnity of the issues involved in much of his teaching that we forget that Jesus had a sense of humor. Here he chooses to use the method of burlesque. He pictures the hypocrite with a great log sticking out of his eye while he solicitously tries to remove a speck from his brother’s eye. But the humorous illustration should not blind us to the seriousness of the lesson it teaches. The slight imperfection in other people is often more apparent to us than the large one in ourselves. Jesus is exhorting us to rigid self-examination before we engage in judgment. It is important that we take the log out of our own eye. It is not important that we concern ourselves with the speck in our brother’s. And it is impossible for us to put our brother right before we have dealt with our own shortcoming. We cannot see clearly enough for the job.”

We must be sure in judging others that we do not suffer from optical illusions. The log in our own eye may be the way we see the speck in the eye of the other person. Removing the log would be to regain the right perspective. It is blowing up out of proportion other people’s shortcomings that makes us unfit to be of help and guide our brother or sister on the road of truth.

²⁰¹ Ps. 139:23,24

6. The tree and the fruit 6:43-45

43 “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.

44 Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars.

45 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

The tree in this parable represents the human heart and the fruit stands for a man’s words and actions. We are reminded of Jeremiah’s statement: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? ‘I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.’”²⁰² There is a relationship between Jesus’ words here and the previous statement about the way we blow up other people’s sins out of proportion. People, who see the beam in other people’s eye and overlook the splinter in their own, do not know their own heart. Only the Holy Spirit can transform the human heart. By nature, man is like a tree that produces bad fruit. The Greek words used are *karpos sapos*, which literally means “rotten fruit.” The KJV renders *sapos* as “corrupt.”

The only way we will be able to produce good fruit is when God gives us a new heart. And God promises to do that if we ask Him for it. We read this promise in Ezekiel: “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.”²⁰³

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the image of figs picked from thornbushes and grapes from briars: “This imagery is taken from what is a common sight in Palestine; behind rough hedges of thorn and of the prickly pear, fig-trees are often seen completely covered with the twining tendrils of vine branches.”

It is probably from these words of Jesus that Paul derived the term “fruit of the spirit.” We read: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”²⁰⁴

7. Foundations 6:46-49

46 “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?

47 I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice.

48 He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.

49 But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

Commenting on the conclusion of Jesus’ message, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: “This sermon, like that in Matthew, concludes with an impressive reminder of the importance of acting on the teaching Jesus has given. There is a difference in detail in Matthew the difference between the two men is that they chose different sites on which to build; here they differ in what they do on the sites.

Evidently some had already shown themselves to be false disciples. So Jesus asks why they call him *Lord, Lord*, but do not obey him. To call anyone ‘Lord’ is to admit that allegiance is owed. To repeat the address is to put a certain emphasis on the admission. But words are no substitute for obedience.

Jesus speaks now of the man who takes notice of what he says. This man is like a builder who *dug deep, and laid the foundation upon rock*. This is essential for sound building, but it is time-consuming and it is

²⁰² Jer. 17:9,10

²⁰³ Ezek. 11:19

²⁰⁴ Gal. 5:19-23

hard work. So some avoid it. But when the storms and floods come, a house built on rock will stand. The hard work is worth it. The parallel in the spiritual life is clear. When the final test comes at judgment day it is the foundation on which our lives are built that matter (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11f.). The words certainly have an application to the storms of this life. The person with a good foundation is not easily upset by life's difficulties; but it is the supreme final test that is specially in mind.

It is different with the house build *on the ground without foundation*. When *the stream broke* against the house built this way, *immediately it fell*. It could not withstand the onslaught. So is the man who hears the teaching of Jesus but does not act on it. He is building his life without a foundation. He may have every outward appearance of respectability and he may be noted for his religious observances, but lacking foundation he is nothing.”

J. Healing the centurion's slave 7:1-10

1 When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.

2 There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.

3 The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.

4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this,

5 because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

6 So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.

7 That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.

8 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel."

10 Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

We find the same story reported by Matthew,²⁰⁵ although with slight differences. In Matthew's account the centurion seems to be coming in person, but according to Luke, he sent a message to Jesus by means of one of his men. John reports a similar incident,²⁰⁶ but that involved a member of the royal court, a man who was probably a Jew. In spite of the differences, we assume that both Matthew and Luke tell the same story.

Luke, as a non-Jew, must have had special interest in this miracle of healing, since it pertained to someone who was also not a Jew. One of the interesting features of the story is that it throws a particular light upon the character of the Roman occupation of Palestine. Having lived under the Nazi occupation of my home-country, the Netherlands, I tend to think of all occupations by foreign governments as similar. There was obviously cruelty and oppression in some instances. Luke mentions elsewhere that Pilate had mixed the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices.²⁰⁷ But there were, evidently, Roman soldiers and officers who admired the Jews and who were attracted to their monotheistic religion.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: "The centurions were the backbone of the Roman army. Usually they came up through the ranks to posts of command because of their character. This officer seems to have been different from the usual hard type of Roman military man. He had a genuine affection for his servant, and he loved the Jewish nation, which most of the Romans despised. His relation with the elders must have been good, else they would not have pled his cause. Perhaps the centurion felt that no Jewish rabbi would do a favor for a Gentile Roman. The ruins of the synagogue now standing in Capernaum show

²⁰⁵ Matt. 8:5-13

²⁰⁶ John 4:46-53

²⁰⁷ Luke 13:1

Roman architecture with Jewish motifs carved on the stones. The synagogue to which Luke alludes was earlier, but this later one may have preserved something of its style.”

In Luke’s version of the event, the centurion never meets Jesus in person. The communication was carried on by means of messages sent through others. Matthew may have taken some “shortcuts” in the way he reported the healing, cutting out the go-betweens. The important part of the story is the content of the messages sent, not the way of communication.

The centurion saw in Jesus the same kind of authority as he knew to exist in the Roman Empire. But he also realized the difference between that which was spiritual and the mundane. This means that he recognized that all authority, whether personal or collective, was derived from the divine. Very few people have this kind of understanding.

The Pulpit Commentary states about this man: “The centurion was apparently one of those foreigners who — without submitting to circumcision and other burdensome ceremonial rites which were incompatible with the exercise of his profession — had accepted the faith of Israel, and worshipped with the people in the position of one who, in another age, would have been termed a ‘proselyte of the gate.’ He was evidently one of those true-hearted men who translated a beautiful *creed* into *acts*, for it was specially urged by the elders, in their petition to Jesus, that he loved the people, no doubt emphasizing his generous almsgivings, and, as a crowning act of his kindness, had built a synagogue Capernaum.”

There are some interesting turns of phrases in the Greek text of vv.4 and 5, indicating the way the Jews felt about this Roman officer. The military man “asked” Jesus to come and the Jewish elders “pleaded earnestly” with Jesus. The Greek uses the verbs *erotao*, “to urge,” and *parakaleo*, “to implore.” Both verbs express an intensity of desire in the request. We find *erotao* used in the verse about the Canaanite mother, whose daughter was demon-possessed. We read there: “Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and *urged* him, ‘Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.’”²⁰⁸ *Parakaleo* has a touch of comfort in it, as in the verse about the massacre of the infants of Bethlehem, when Matthew quotes Jeremiah, saying: “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be *comforted*, because they are no more.”²⁰⁹

Jesus offered no objection to go to the place where the centurion resided. At some places in the New Testament, we see that Jews believed that going into the home of a Gentile would make them ceremonially impure.²¹⁰ Neither Jesus nor the Jewish elders raise that point here. Evidently, the fact that this man had financed the building of a synagogue changed the whole matter of ceremonial purity and impurity.

When the Roman receives word that Jesus is on the way to his house, he shows genuine humility, which is another exceptional feature. Very few Romans, if any, would have felt inferior to a Jew, whether rabbi or common citizen. This man must have recognized Jesus’ superiority because of His relationship with the God of the Jews, whom this man respected. The testimony of the Jewish elders to Jesus about this man was: “This man deserves to have you do this.” The Roman’s own conviction was: “I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.” *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes Augustine at this point, who wrote: “By saying that he was unworthy, he showed himself worthy of Christ’s entering, not within his walls, but within his heart.”

As Jesus approaches the officer’s home, He receives a message, stating that it would not be needed for Him to be present in person to perform the healing; a simple command would be enough. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “The centurion’s message began, *Lord* (perhaps, ‘Sir’), *do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof*. The centurion was plainly a humble man. He had not met Jesus but knew enough about him to accord him a high place. Probably also he realized that a religious Jew might have scruples about entering the house of a Gentile. He went on, *therefore I did not presume to come to you*, where *presume* renders a verb meaning ‘count (*sc.* myself) worthy’ (it is a different word translated ‘worthy’ in v. 6). The elders had already affirmed that he was worthy (4), but in his modesty he would not claim so much.

²⁰⁸ Matt. 15:23

²⁰⁹ Matt. 2:18

²¹⁰ John 18:18; Acts 10:28

He went on to make it clear that he did not see it as necessary for Jesus to be present in person in order to effect a cure. All that was necessary was that he should *say the word* (lit. ‘speak with a word’; he is regarding the word as the instrument whereby Jesus’ purpose would be effected). The power was in the word Jesus spoke. Nothing more was needed. The man can illustrate from his own experience. He did not have to be present to have his command accomplish what he willed. He could say *Go* or *Come* or *Do this* and know that in each case his word would be obeyed. He does not say, ‘I am a man with authority’ as might have been expected, but *I am a man set under authority*. The humility of the man comes out in his reference to his place in a graded hierarchy, when he might well have spoken only of his superiority to those beneath him. His words may imply that Jesus, like himself, drew his authority from a higher source. There is probably no great significance in his referring to soldiers as people who go and come at his bidding and of his slave as the one to whom he says *Do this*. The point is that in more than one way, with soldiers and slave, the centurion’s commands are obeyed.”

We read that Jesus’ reaction to this man’s message was one of amazement. The Greek word used is *thaumazo*, which implies admiration. In this case, however, the meaning probably does not go beyond amazement.

Luke does not report Jesus’ actual response to the man’s request. In Matthew’s version of the event, Jesus replies directly, saying: “Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.”²¹¹ Luke only speaks of Jesus’ amazement, saying: “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” As in the case of the woman, who touched Jesus’ garment, and to whom Jesus said: “your faith has healed you,” the emphasis here is not on Jesus’ power to work miracles, but on the faith that expects the miracle to occur.

In Matthew’s version we find another remark Jesus made, which Luke omits: “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”²¹² That prophetic statement is, at the same time, a great missionary message and a tragic observation about those who ought to have received the message of salvation to begin with. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: “We worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.”²¹³ But the nation that God had chosen to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” never understood its calling.

K. The widow of Nain’s son 7:11-17

11 *Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him.*

12 *As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out — the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.*

13 *When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”*

14 *Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!”*

15 *The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.*

16 *They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.”*

17 *This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.*

Luke is the only Gospel writer who reports this raising of the dead young man. There are three instances in the New Testament in which it is reported that Jesus brought back to life a dead person. Jairus’ daughter and Lazarus are the other two. This is also the only raising of a dead is reported in Luke’s Gospel.

The dead person in this story was the only son of a widow. Since she had lost her husband, her hope and sustenance depended on her son. His death meant more for her than the loss of a loved one. It affected her

²¹¹ Matt. 8:13

²¹² Matt. 8:11,12

²¹³ John 4:22

and her livelihood. Henceforth she would be dependant upon people's charity. And it meant the end of the family name.

We don't know how the Old Testament law of possession of land was maintained in New Testament times. From the story of Naomi and Ruth we learn that it was a complicated matter and that a widow depended upon the goodwill of her male relatives in order to keep and use the land that had been in her husband's name. But the law of heritage in the Promised Land, which was such an important matter in the Old Testament, may not have had the same importance in the New.

In this story it is particularly the sadness of losing a person in death that stands out. As Jesus, accompanied by His disciples and "a large crowd," approaches the city gate of Nain, the funeral procession just leaves the town.

According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, Nain is "on the slope of Little Hermon, near Endor, some twenty or more miles from Capernaum. It is approached by a narrow, steep ascent, and on either side of the road are sepulchral caves." This funeral procession was probably made up of "professional mourners," beside the mother of the boy and friends and neighbors. Those "mourners" would make it a point to weep out loud and give to the cortège a dramatic aspect.

Our problem with death is that we cannot see beyond that which is visible on earth. Death means ultimate separation for us. It is irreversible. As David said at the death of his infant, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me."²¹⁴ It is "the undiscovered country from which borne no traveler returns."

The NIV reads: that Jesus' heart went out to her. The Greek text reads literally: "The Lord had compassion on her." The Greek word used is *splagchnizomai*, which means literally "to have the bowels yearn." The same word is used in the verse: "When he saw the crowds, he had *compassion* on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."²¹⁵ We could use the less sophisticated expression: "It hit Him in His guts." The picture of Jesus' deep emotions at the sight of this funeral tells us much about how God feels about our sufferings and losses. Our grief does not leave Him cold or untouched; He feels our pain deeper than we do ourselves.

And the wonder of it all is that He is the only one who can do something about it. His first act consisted of a word of comfort to the weeping mother: "Don't cry." If it were not for what followed, those would have been empty words. But next, Jesus moved to the coffin, touched it and spoke to the dead body of the young man, saying *egértheeti*, literally: "wake up."

At this point, Jesus had not conquered death yet in His own resurrection. What He did here in the raising of this young man was a down payment on His own victory over death. He gained this victory by going through the experience of death Himself, through death in its most horrible form: crucifixion. The author of Hebrew explains that this was the main reason for the Incarnation. We read: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."²¹⁶ At the raising of Lazarus from the dead, Jesus made the declaration: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."²¹⁷ Both resurrections, as well as the one of Jairus' daughter, were based upon the fact that Jesus would eventually conquer death by taking the curse of death upon Himself.

Death is God's enemy. He hates death even more than we can ever hate it. And He has compassion on all who suffer from the experience of separation from the ones we love. For us, who stand on the other side of Jesus' resurrection, our own death will be the gate through which we enter into eternal glory. God uses the enemy's tool to bring us into eternal fellowship with Himself. It will mean for us "to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far."²¹⁸

²¹⁴ II Sam. 12:23

²¹⁵ Matt. 9:36

²¹⁶ Heb. 2:14,15

²¹⁷ John 11:25

²¹⁸ Phil 1:23

After bringing the young man back to life, Jesus gives him back to his mother. This boy became hers in a way he had never been before. Her loss turned into a gift of unspeakable value. For the rest of their life together she would look upon him as the one she had been given to her by an act of God. We only really possess what we give up to God and what He gives back to us.

In concluding this story, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, adds: “Those who saw this reacted as in the presence of God. *Fear*, which must be understood as awe, took hold of them. They *glorified God*, interestingly not Jesus. They recognized the hand of God in what had happened and gave praise where it was due. But they did salute Jesus, calling him *a great prophet*. This is an inadequate view of Jesus, but it probably represented the highest title the townsmen could give anyone. It may have been called forth by the reflection that Jesus had just done what two great prophets did in days of old (1 Kgs. 17:17ff; 2 Kgs. 4:18ff). The people further exclaimed, *God has visited his people!* This expression is not uncommon in the Old Testament where it often denotes blessing, as here (e.g. Ruth 1:6; 1 Sam. 2:21), though sometimes also judgment. The inevitable result of all this was a further increase in the fame of Jesus as the news spread far and wide. *Judea* is probably used here in the wider sense of Palestine in general, while the mention of *the surrounding country* shows that Jesus’ fame was very widespread indeed.”

L. John the Baptist’s questions (7:18-35)

1. The questions asked and answered 7:18-23

18 *John’s disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them,*

19 *he sent them to the Lord to ask, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”*

20 *When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’”*

21 *At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind.*

22 *So he replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.*

23 *Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”*

It would be easy for us to blame John the Baptist for this lapse of faith. There is not doubt about it that most of his doubt was the result of his most miserable circumstances. Later Jesus would say about John: “among those born of women there is no one greater than John.” John the Baptist had been God’s greatest herald at the fullness of time, when God became a human being. We could disrespectfully say, however, that God did not treat His choice servant too well. All this is, of course, human reasoning. John had fulfilled his duty by introducing Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, as the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. And now God had, so to speak, thrown him aside and let him suffer in Herod’s dungeon. Even worse, God would allow John to become the pawn in a gamble between King Herod and his illegitimate wife, which would result in John’s beheading. No one in Bible history has ever been treated like that by the Lord of the universe.

Yet, at the end of this section, Jesus sends John the message “Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” The Greek word rendered “fall away” is *skandalizo*, “to scandalize.” It is helpful to put John’s experience next to Paul’s who virtually experienced similar moments of despondency and rejection in his ministry for the Lord. Paul wrote to the church of Corinth: “Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.”²¹⁹ And to Timothy he wrote: “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the

²¹⁹ I Cor. 4:13

righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”²²⁰ John could have greatly benefitted from Paul’s words, had he know about them.

From a human viewpoint it is amazing to see how God permits some of His choice servants to be treated. It seems as if He shoves them aside when they are not longer of service to Him. They are put on a dead trail and left to their own thoughts of misery. We must remember that this is the image we see from below. That is the picture Satan wants us to see. It is part of his demonic propaganda of lies. We cannot fully understand the character of the struggle that still goes on in the heavenly places between the forces of darkness and the light of God. We do not know according to what rules the battle is being fought. But it will be helpful if we can see that some of the incidents, that look inexplicable to us, are part of that battle.

We may be sure that when John’s head was cut off in Herod’s prison, his soul went straight to heaven and in the presence of God’s glory he was given the reward that was due to the one who had been the greatest of God’s servants in the Old Testament dispensation.

When John’s disciples tell him in prison about Jesus’ miracles, particularly the one of the resurrection of the widow’s son, John ought to have rejoiced, realizing that, the One he had announced as the Savior of the world, was indeed the One he knew Him to be. But the opposite happened. The news made John more miserable. He probably felt that He, who had come to set the prisoners free, ought to have come to his prison and open the door for him. That is where doubt slipped in; doubt probably more about himself than about Jesus.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “What, now, was in John the Baptist’s mind, when from his prison he sent his disciples to ask Jesus this anxious question? Disappointed in the career of Jesus, possibly himself partly forgotten, accustomed to the wild freedom of a desert-life, suffering from the hopeless imprisonment, — had his faith begun to waver? Or was the question put with a view of reassuring his own disciples, with the intention of giving these faithful followers of his an opportunity of convincing themselves of the power and real glory of Jesus? In other words, was it for *his own* sake or for *his disciples’* sakes that he sent to ask the question? Generally speaking, the second of these two conclusions — that which ascribed the question to a desire on the part of John to help his disciples (which we will call B) — was adopted by the expositors of the early Church. A good example of this school of interpretation is the following quotation from St. Jerome: ‘John does not put this question from ignorance, for he himself had proclaimed Christ to be ‘the Lamb of God.’ But as our Lord asked concerning the body of Lazarus, ‘Where have ye laid him?’ (... John 11:34), in order that they who answered the question might, by their own answer, be led to faith, so John, now about to be slain by Herod, sends his disciples to Jesus, in order that, by this occasion, they who were jealous of the fame of Jesus (... Luke 9:14; ... John 3:26) might see his mighty works and believe in him, and that, while their master asked the question by them, they might hear the truth for themselves’ (St. Jerome, quoted by Wordsworth) ... On the other hand, Tertullian among the Fathers, and nearly all the modern expositors, believe that the question of John was prompted by his own wavering faith — a faltering no doubt shared in by his own disciples. This conclusion (which we will term A) is adopted, with slightly varying modifications, by ... [some modern Bible scholars]. This way — (A) generally adopted by the modern school of expositors — of understanding the Baptist’s question to Jesus, is evidently the conclusion which would suggest itself to all minds who went to the story without any preconceived desire to purge the character of a great saint from what they imagine to be a blot; and we shall presently see that our Lord, in his answer to the question, where a rebuke is exquisitely veiled in a beatitude, evidently understood the forerunner’s question in this sense. It is thus ever the practice of Holy Scripture; while it tenderly and lovingly handles the characters of its heroes, it never flinches from the truth. We see God’s noblest saints, such as Moses and Elijah (John’s own prototype) in the Old Testament, Peter and Paul in the New Testament, depicted in this book of truth with all their faults; nothing is hid. Only *one* flawless character appears in its storied pages — it is only the Master of Peter and Paul who never turns aside from the path of right.”

John’s doubts must have pertained to his own ministry, which, from the perspective of his imprisonment, looked to him as a complete failure. He had earlier announced: “I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of

²²⁰ II Tim. 4:6-8

him.”²²¹ Evidently, that certainty had gone. John must have suffered from a severe depression, due to his imprisonment.

Jesus’ answer to John is a simple report of the results of His own ministry, of which John had been a part. The “Bridegroom” sends here a message to “the friend of the Bridegroom” about the miracles that have occurred. Jesus must have rejoiced in the ministry the Father had given Him and He wanted John to be part of that joy and not be scandalized. What Jesus is saying is, in fact, “I am the One; see for yourself!” And He sends John’s disciples back with a blessing: “Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” That is a severe blessing. As we saw above, the Greek word used is *skandalizo*, “to scandalize.” John must have been hurt rather hard when he received this message. The noun refers to a bait put in a trap. The word contains a reference to being seduced by Satan. John, who had been filled by the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb, fell in a trap by suggestions of the devil.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary has the following lengthy, but thoughtful comment on John’s spiritual and emotional condition: “When we come to deal with them as facts, we see in them but vivid illustrations of certain features of the divine procedure for which we ought to be prepared. When the three Hebrew youths were threatened with the burning fiery furnace if they would not worship Nebuchadnezzar’s golden idol, they expressed their full conviction that the God they served both could and would deliver them; but even should they be mistaken in this expectation, they were still resolved rather to suffer than to sin. And they suffered not. But John did. He had indeed counted the cost, but he had it to pay. ‘Wilt thou be faithful even unto death?’ was the question, and his spirit answered, Yes. ‘Canst thou lie in prison unrescued, and even uncheered, except by the light thou already hast, and at length in a moment be dispatched by those whom thy fidelity hath stung to the quick?’ To this also his true heart doubtless bowed, though the trying question was never explicitly submitted to him. And such is what thousands of the martyrs of Jesus have undergone for His name. Nor can we doubt that this very record of the Lord’s procedure toward the Baptist has soothed many a one when called to pass through a like dreary period of comfortless suffering, ending in death, for Jesus’ sake. And may we not please ourselves with the thought that, like as the words wrung from the Savior Himself in Gethsemane – ‘O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me’ - were followed by the placid words, ‘Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit’; so the deep depression which prompted the question, ‘Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?’ was followed by a serene contentment and placid hope which might thus sing its pensive song, and only be interrupted by the murderer with his bloody axe?”

The same *Commentary* adds Cowper’s beautiful poem:

“God moves in a mysterious way
 His wonders to perform:
 He plants His footsteps in the sea,
 And rides upon the storm.
 Deep in unfathomable mines
 Of never-failing skill,
 He treasures up His bright designs,
 And works His sovereign will.
 His purposes will ripen fast,
 Unfolding every hour;
 The bud may have a bitter taste,
 But sweet will be the flower.”

2. The greatness of John 7:24-30

24 *After John’s messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?”*

25 *If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces.*

26 *But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.*

²²¹ John 3:28

27 This is the one about whom it is written: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’

28 I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

29 (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptized by John.

30 But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

The men, who had been sent by John to ask Jesus the question about His identity, either were in His presence for a considerable time, or they received confirmation by the crowd of the miracles Jesus mentioned. It seems doubtful that they themselves witnessed all the miracles of the lame walking, the blind seeing and the dead being brought back to life.

After John’s delegation leaves, Jesus addressed the crowd. This means that they did not hear what Jesus said about John and his ministry. The crowd heard the conversation Jesus had with John’s delegates and they may have received the impression that they had been wrong when they were drawn to John’s ministry and followed his teaching. Some may have been baptized by John.

The style of Jesus’ address to the crowd is typically Jewish; it is made in the form of rhetorical questions that expect a negative answer. In his style of preaching and his choice of venue, John had been the opposite of what we would expect a successful preacher to do. A prophet who wants his message to reach the public would have installed himself at the gate of the temple, where people would naturally be drawn to hear. The Transjordanian desert where John installed his pulpit had been the most unlikely place to draw a crowd. Yet, a crowd he drew! John had not been the prototype of a television preacher either, being dressed in tailored outfits. It had been the Holy Spirit who had drawn the crowds to John.

The reason crowds had been drawn to John was that he spoke the truth of the Word of God that had not been preached in Israel for several centuries. Israel had not had a prophet since the days of Malachi.

Jesus’ compliment to John surpasses everything He ever said about anybody. John was not only “a prophet,” he was the greatest prophet ever born of women!

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: “The point of comparison is manifestly not personal character; for as it could hardly be said that in this respect he excelled every human being that preceded him, so it would be absurd to say that he was outstripped by the least advanced of the disciples of Christ. It is of his official standing or position in the economy of grace that our Lord is speaking. In that respect he was above all that ever went before him, inasmuch as he was the last and most honored of the Old Testament prophets, and stood on the very edge of the new economy, though belonging to the old: but for this very reason, the humblest member of the new economy was in advance of him.”

The words “the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” have caused a good deal of confusion among Bible scholars. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The usual explanation adopted by most if not all modern theologians of the last clause of the verse is, that, great as John was, yet he that is least among Christians who have been *born of God* and have accepted as an article of their faith the crucifixion and ascension of the Son of God, is greater than that great prophet; or, in other words, the humblest child of the new kingdom is superior to the greatest prophet of the old.” But then the same *Commentary* continues to quote a certain number of Church Fathers and modern theologians, who interpret “the least in the kingdom of God” to refer to Jesus Himself. That doesn’t seem to make much sense to me. I prefer Leon Morris comment in *Luke*, which reads: “Jesus’ coming marked a watershed. He came to inaugurate the kingdom. And the least in that kingdom is greater than the greatest of men. This is a statement of historical fact. John belonged to the time of promise. The least in the kingdom is *greater*, not because of any personal qualities he may have, but because he belongs to the time of fulfillment. Jesus is not minimizing the importance of John. He is putting membership of the kingdom into its proper perspective. There is something more important than following John: entry to the kingdom.”

John had experienced the filling of the Holy Spirit in his life and ministry, but this had not baptized him as a member into the body of Christ. John belonged to the Old Testament body of believers, not to the New Testament church of Jesus Christ.

At this point Matthew adds another of Jesus' statements: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. He who has ears, let him hear." This is a reference to Malachi's prophecy: "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."²²²

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: "The quotation from Mal 3:1 is doubly significant. It establishes John as the forerunner of the Messiah, which places him above all the other prophets. Thee in the original of the quoted text reads 'me', and refers to God, who speaks these words, adding, 'and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in.' By implication, then, Jesus is identified with the Lord of Malachi, and his deity is affirmed ... John was the greatest and last of the prophets, and the herald of a new dispensation ... John knew only that redemption and the work of the Holy Spirit would be introduced by Jesus (John 1:29-34); he did not live to see the work of Christ perfected. Those who live in the era of the kingdom of God have greater privileges and powers than John."

About the last two verses of this section, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: "It is often held that verses 29-30 are a parenthesis inserted at this point by Luke. But such an insertion into a speech of Jesus is quite without parallel. The uncertainty arises because in the Greek there is no object for the verb rendered *heard*. RSV supplies *this*, which demands that the section be in parenthesis. But we could instead supply 'him' ... or 'John' ... Taken this way, Jesus follows a reference to John's greatness with one to the reactions to his preaching. This seems preferable. ... *All the people* seems inclusive enough to take care of *the tax collectors*. But the tax men were so hated and ostracized that they formed a race apart ... so they are emphasized ... 'even the tax-collectors'). But these common people justified God, i.e. they pronounced God just, they accepted the ways of God as they were and did not try to constrain him into a mould of their own manufactures. This is seen in that they were *baptized with the baptism of John*, a baptism that was with a view to repentance, and which pointed people forward to the work that Jesus would do.

Over against the penitent little people Jesus sets *the Pharisees and the lawyers*. The *lawyers* were men who gave themselves over to the study of the law of God. They were very good at understanding the minutiae of the law without ever coming to grips with its essential message. They were concerned with the law of God but not with the will of God. So they and the Pharisees *rejected the purpose of God for themselves*. Where simpler people had heard and responded to God's call to repent, these men in their complacency and smug self-satisfaction found nothing to repent of. They rejected God's way of blessing and would not give Jesus an open hearing when he came. The closed mind leads to mistake on mistake."

3. The reaction of the hearers 7:31-35

31 *"To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like?"*

32 *They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry."*

33 *For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'*

34 *The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."* "

35 *But wisdom is proved right by all her children."*

We could say that, at this point, Jesus looked at a public opinion poll about a comparison between Himself and John the Baptist. Nothing is more changeable and unreliable than public opinions. Yet, politicians and other people in leadership positions set great value on them and allow their actions and

²²² Mal. 4:5,6

votes to be determined by them. If we compare what the people thought about Jesus on Palm Sunday, when He entered Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, with their cry “crucify, crucify” during the trial at Pilate’s palace, we get a clear picture of the value of public opinions. Those who set their course in public life upon them are like the man who built his house on the sand.

Jesus’ remarks are based upon Luke’s statement in the previous verses about the attitude of the Pharisees and tax collectors toward John’s ministry and His own. Those who were considered the scum of the nation had repented and submitted to John’s baptism, but the Pharisees and doctors of the law had considered themselves too righteous to repent.

Jesus compares them to children at play, who made music and were angry because no one played with them. The comparison of people, who considered themselves high-placed and experts in their field, to children playing homemade flutes is not complementary. The illustration gives us a good idea of what God thinks about us and about what we are doing.

This is not the only time Jesus takes a child as an example of what we are in the eye of God and what we ought ourselves to consider to be. The concluding phrase “wisdom is proved right by all her children” is the core of the truth Jesus expounds here. The Greek text uses the verb *dikaioo*, “to justify.” It is the same word Paul uses in his famous statement: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are *justified* freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”²²³

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “Jesus asks a rhetorical question about what *the men of this generation* are like and answers in terms of children at play. He quotes a little couplet which children apparently used when other children would not join their games. When they *piped* cheerily their playmates refused to dance, but when they went to the opposite extreme and *wailed* their friends would not cooperate in that either. They would be neither cheerful nor glum. It is not quite clear whether *the men of this generation* are being likened to the children who *piped* and *wailed* or to those who refused to *dance* or *weep*. In the first case the thought is that they complained that John the Baptist would not be merry, but changed their tune when Jesus came, blaming him for not being gloomy. In the second case they responded neither to Jesus’ cheerfulness nor to John’s solemnity. Perhaps there is slightly more to be said for the latter, but either way the point is much the same. They would accept neither Jesus nor John.”

The point seems rather to be that the leaders of the nation neither responded to John’s preaching of repentance, which required tears and contrition, nor did they rejoice when the bridegroom came and invited them to join the merriment of the wedding. Behind the images Jesus used is the truth that repentance of sin leads to the joy of salvation. There may be more of God in the flute-playing children than of those of the generation of Jesus’ time; although they appear to be the subject.

M. The anointing of Jesus by a sinful woman 7:36-50

36 *Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table.*

37 *When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,*

38 *and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.*

39 *When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is — that she is a sinner.”*

40 *Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said.*

41 *“Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.*

42 *Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”*

²²³ Rom. 3:23,24

43 Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.” “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.

46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven — for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”

48 Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

49 The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

50 Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

There are three other stories in the Gospels of a woman anointing Jesus’ feet,²²⁴ but they all refer to an incident that occurred in the last week of Jesus’ life, just before the crucifixion. In John’s Gospel that woman is identified as Mary, the sister of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. The woman in Luke’s story here is described as “a sinner,” evidently in the sense of a prostitute, whose touch would make a man ceremoniously unclean.

In the case of Mary’s anointing of Jesus’ feet, Jesus was in the home of a man who was also called Simon, but Matthew identifies him as “Simon the Leper,” not as a Pharisee.

It appears that this Simon’s invitation to Jesus to come into his home was not without ulterior motives. The fact that he failed to treat Jesus as a guest of honor, not offering a foot washing or a welcoming kiss, means that this man was rude. He treated Jesus as inferior and only allowed Him to sit at his table so he could observe Him closely.

There can hardly been greater contrast between two people than between Simon, the Pharisee, and the woman, who was a prostitute. The Pharisee considered himself to be above reproach, although there may have been a slight form of admission in identifying himself with the person who owed God the small sum of fifty denarii. A footnote in the NIV states: “A denarius was a coin worth about a day’s wages.” *The Living Bible* paraphrases the amounts of money as \$5000 and \$500.

Both Simon and the woman must have heard Jesus preach and seen Him perform miracles. Simon must have found it interesting enough to invited Jesus and find out more about Him. The woman had concluded that there was a solution to her sin problem and Jesus’ Words had given her a sense of forgiveness. The load of guilt had been lifted off her shoulders before she entered Simon’s house. The act of washing Jesus’ feet with her tears and anointing them with perfume were acts of thanksgiving and worship. She came to say “Thank You!”

As far as Simon was concerned, the fact that Jesus allowed her to perform her acts was an indication that He was not a prophet. Had He known who the woman was and what her reputation in town was, He would never have permitted her to touch Him, for fear of becoming ceremoniously unclean.

Simon could not understand that touching Jesus would not pollute Him but would make the unclean clean and the sick healthy. Had he received Jesus as a guest of honor, which was the least he could have done as a polite host, would he have washed Jesus’ feet and given Him the kiss of friendship, his debt of \$500 would have been wiped off God’s slate also.

He had probably invited Jesus with some prejudice, trying to prove that He was not what He claimed to be. As it turns out Simon is the one who is judged here and found not measuring up to his own standards.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about the woman anointing Jesus’ feet: “She anointed Jesus’ feet with the unguent. Normally, this would have been poured on the head. To use it on the feet is probably a mark of

²²⁴ Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8

humility. To attend to the feet was a menial task, one assigned to a slave. It is a fair conjecture that Jesus had turned this woman from her sinful ways and that all this was the expression of her love and gratitude. It is not clear whether she had met Jesus. She may simply have been among the crowds who listened to his teaching and had been so convicted that her life had been changed. Or she may have had unrecorded contacts with Jesus. We do not know.

Jesus' host saw all this and engaged in a little disapproving conversation with himself. The form of conditional sentence he used implies in the Greek (a) that Jesus was not a prophet, and (b) that he did not know *who and what sort of woman* was touching him.

Jesus proceeds to correct both mistakes. The Pharisee had not spoken aloud, but Jesus answered his thoughts. He began by showing that he knew who and what sort of man Simon was. First he said that he had something to say which got Simon's undivided attention. The Pharisee's replay is rather 'Speak on' (NEB) than *What is it?* His words are polite but not encouraging.

Jesus told a little story about two debtors who were excused their debts, the one *five hundred denarii*, the other *fifty* (a denarius was a day's pay for a laborer, Matt. 20:2). It did not need a great deal of insight to recognize which would love the benefactor the more. Yet Simon's reply is somewhat grudging, with his *I suppose* before the one who was forgiven. Jesus did not comment on this, but agreed that Simon had given the right answer."

In this little parable, both Simon and the woman are obviously the ones represented. That means that Simon was forced to identify himself with the person who owed fifty denarii. The problem is that neither was able to pay their debt. That leaves the question, who is the poorer of the two, the one who cannot afford to pay the smaller some or the larger one? The point of the whole story of that Simon's lack of gratitude exposes his poverty!

The woman had come to a perfect understanding of God's grace, but Simon had no idea what it was all about. Yet, he was the one who was versed in the Law of Moses. He knew that without the sacrifice he would present to God in the form of a sacrificial animal, his life would be forfeited. He knew this, but he did not believe it. Neither of the two could understand that they would be forgiven because Jesus paid their debt to God with His own sacrifice. The woman's intuition had told her more than she could comprehend.

Jesus then compares the woman's behavior toward Him with Simon's. She had come to thank Jesus and what she did amounted to a form of worship. At the birth of John the Baptist, his father had sung that in this God would "give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins."²²⁵ Simon's behavior toward Jesus Christ had been impolite and rude. He had not even treated Jesus as a fellowman. His behavior toward Him had been as of a slave owner who allowed his slave to sit at his table for a short time.

Jesus spares no words in letting His host know how rude he had been. Simon had not considered himself to be a sinner who needed forgiveness; he thought owed God nothing. Had we asked Simon what he thought about God, he would have come up with great and flowery descriptions of the Almighty. But with his behavior he showed that he despised his Creator. Jesus would later say about people like Simon: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."²²⁶

The scene ends with Jesus' statement about the relationship between forgiveness and gratitude. Neither Simon, nor the woman could have fully understood who Jesus was and what He had come to do in this world. But the woman was closer to the truth because of her conviction of sin and the realization that she had been forgiven. That kind of gratitude is the basis for all worship. The great commandment of the law is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."²²⁷ This was supplemented with: "Love your neighbor as yourself."²²⁸ Simon had broken both commandments.

²²⁵ Luke 1:77

²²⁶ John 8:44

²²⁷ Deut. 6:5

²²⁸ Lev. 19:18

He felt that his debt had been so small that forgiveness did not require any gratitude. He had no idea who the God was he would face on the day of judgment.

Jesus ends His conversation with the statement to the woman: “Your sins are forgiven,” and “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” She had not been forgiven because of her expression gratitude. Her gratitude was the fruit of her forgiveness, not the root of it.

At this point, we find out that there were other guests at Simon’s table, who ask themselves the question “Who is this who even forgives sins?” We wonder if Simon had given them the same treatment as guests as he had given to Jesus. Probably not!

N. Women who helped Jesus 8:1-3

1 *After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him,*

2 *and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;*

3 *Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “*Soon afterward* Jesus went on a preaching tour. The verb *went on* (*diodeuō*) ‘conveys the idea of a continuing wandering ministry (imperfect), rather than a journey from one point to another’ ... There is no mention of synagogues and it may well be that increasing hostility on the part of the synagogue establishment led him to concentrate on preaching and teaching in the open air. He did not lack an audience, for there are repeated references to crowds (cf. 7:11, 24; 8:4, 19, 40, 41). On this occasion he was accompanied by the Twelve and by *some women* whom he had healed. The rabbis refused to teach women and generally assigned them a very inferior place. But Jesus freely admitted them into fellowship, as on this occasion, and accepted their service. First to be mentioned is *Mary, called Magdalene* (a place-name, meaning ‘of Magdala,’ i.e. ‘The Tower’). The Christian imagination has made free with Mary Magdalene, mostly seeing her as a beautiful woman whom Jesus had saved from an immoral life. There is nothing whatever in the sources to indicate this. Luke says that *seven demons had gone out* from her, which shows that Jesus had rescued her from a very distressing existence. But there is no reason for connecting the demons with immoral conduct: they are more usually associated with mental or physical disorder. *Joanna* is mentioned again in 24:10, but otherwise nothing is known of her. Her husband *Chuzā* is mentioned here only. That he was *Herod’s steward* shows that he was a man of substance, though the precise nature of his office is not clear. The word translated *steward* may mean the manager of Herod’s estates, or it may point to a political office. Godet conjectures that this man may have been the officer whose son Jesus healed (John 4:46ff.). If so, it would explain why Joanna was numbered among Jesus’ followers and allowed to go with him on this tour. Nothing more is known of *Susanna*. Luke does not go into further detail; there were *many others*, but he adds only that they *provided for them out of their means*. This is valuable as giving us one of the few glimpses we have of the way Jesus’ needs during his ministry were met. We read of the apostolic band as having a common purse from which purchases of food were made and gifts were given to the poor (John 13:29), but not of how it was supplied. Here we learn that these women responded in love and gratitude for what Jesus had done for them (cf. Mark 15:40f.). It seems to have been not uncommon for godly women to help religious teachers, and Jesus speaks of some Pharisees who were evidently quite rapacious (20:47). It is heart-warming to read of this group of woman who supported Jesus. And it is worth reflection that the Gospels record no woman as ever taking action against him: his enemies were all men.”

Morris’ comments on these verses seem to cover the subject well. His observation that Mary Magdalene’s deliverance from demon possession by seven demons would not imply that Jesus have freed her from immoral behavior seems like jumping to a conclusion that is somewhat naïf. Demon possession rarely leads to chastity. He also seems to suggest that, what is called demon possession, may simply have been a condition of being mentally or emotionally impaired, which the public mind ascribed to the work of a demon. But the suggestions are too indistinct to become subject of controversy.

There is also in these short verses a beautiful lesson as to the use of money God has entrusted to us. What He has given us is a loan and He will ask us for an account as to how we have handled His trust for Him. This will be brought out more clearly in other sections of Luke's Gospel.

O. The parable of the sower 8:4-15

4 *While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable:*

5 *“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up.*

6 *Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture.*

7 *Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.*

8 *Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.”*

When he said this, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

9 *His disciples asked him what this parable meant.*

10 *He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, ““though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.”*

11 *“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.*

12 *Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.*

13 *Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.*

14 *The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.*

15 *But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.*

According to *Mark's Gospel*, understanding this parable is the key to understanding all of Jesus' teaching, given in the form of a parable. We read that Jesus replied to the disciples' question about the meaning: “Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?”²²⁹

The parable of the sower is found in all three of the synoptic Gospels.²³⁰ From Matthew, we learn that Jesus began teaching in parables because the Pharisees had reacted to Jesus' healing of demon-possessed man by saying: “It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”²³¹ Teaching the truth directly would, in Jesus' own words, have meant throwing pearls to pigs.²³²

The Pulpit Commentary states: “It was from this time onward that, when he taught, he seems generally to have spoken in those famous parables, or stories, in which so much of his recorded teaching is shrined. Hitherto in his preaching he had occasionally made use of similes or comparisons, as in ... Luke 5:6 and ... Luke 6:29, 48; but he only began the formal use of the parable at this period, and the parable of the sower seems to have been the earliest spoken. Perhaps because it was the first, perhaps on account of the far-reaching nature of its contents, the story of ‘the sower’ evidently impressed itself with singular force upon the minds of the disciples. It evidently formed a favorite ‘memory’ among the first heralds of the new faith. It is the only one, with the exception of the vine-dressers, one of the latest spoken, which has been preserved by the three — Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is identical in structure and in teaching in all the three, which shows that they were relating the same story. It differs, however, in detail; we thus gather that

²²⁹ Mark 4:13

²³⁰ Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23; Mark 4:4-8, 13-20

²³¹ Matt. 12:24

²³² Matt. 7:6

the three did not copy from one primitive document, but that these ‘memories’ were derived either from their own recollections or at least from different sources.

Now, what induced the Master thus deliberately to change the manner of his teaching? In other words, why, from this time forward, does he veil so much of his deep Divine thought in parables? Let us consider the attitude of the crowds who till now had been listening to him. What may be termed the Galilean revival had well-nigh come to an end. The enthusiasm he had evoked by his burning words, his true wisdom, his novel exposition of what belonged to human life and duty, was, when he left Capernaum and began his preaching in every little village (ver. 1), at its height. But the great Heart-reader knew well that the hour of reaction was at hand. *Then* the pressure of the crowds which thronged him was so great that, to speak this first parable, he had to get into a boat and address the multitude standing on the shore (... Matthew 13:2); but the moment was at hand which St. John (... John 6:66) refers to in his sad words, ‘From *that time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.’ It was in view of that moment that Jesus commenced his parable-teaching with ‘the sower.’ As regards the *great mass* of the people who had crowded to hear his words and look on his miracles, the Lord knew that his work had practically failed. At the first he spoke to the people plainly. The sermon on the mount, for instance, contains little, if anything, of the parable form; but they understood him not, forming altogether false views of the kingdom he described to them. He now changes his method of teaching, veiling his thoughts in parables, in order that *his own*, to whom privately he gave the key to the right understanding of the parables, should see more clearly, and that those who deliberately misunderstood him — the hostile Pharisee and Sadducee, for instance — should be simply mystified and perplexed as to the Teacher’s meaning; while the merely thoughtless might possibly be fascinated and attracted by this new manner of teaching, which evidently veiled some hidden meaning. These last would probably be induced to inquire further as to the meaning of these strange parable stories. Professor Bruce, who has very ably discussed the reasons which induced Christ at this period of his ministry to speak in parables, says there is a mood which leads a man to present his thoughts in this form. ‘It is the mood of one whose heart is chilled, and whose spirit is saddened by a sense of loneliness, and who, retiring within himself by a process of reflection, frames for his thoughts forms which half conceal, half reveal them — reveal them more perfectly to those who understand, hide them from those who do not (and will not) — forms beautiful, but also melancholy, as the hues of forest in late autumn. If this view be correct, we should expect the teaching in parables would not form a feature of the *initial* stage of Christ’s ministry. And such accordingly was the fact.’ As regarded the men of his own generation, did he use the parable way of teaching almost as a fan to separate the wheat from the chaff? ‘That he had to speak in parables was one of the burdens of the Son of man, to be placed side by side with the fact that he had not where to lay his head.’”

Matthew saw in Jesus’ use of parables a means of teaching that was the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. Quoting Asaph, he states: “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”²³³ That is a free quotation of Asaph’s psalm which reads literally: “O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old ...”²³⁴

The immediate reaction of the audience to the telling of this parable must have been: “What does this mean?” The disciples’ question was the question of the whole audience. The result of Jesus’ method astonished the people. It would be the same if, in one of our church services, the pastor would get up to preach and would only say: “This morning, coming to this church, I saw a car hit a pedestrian. The man fell on the ground and left to die. Amen!”

If it were not for the answer given to the disciples, we would also be left in the dark as to the meaning of the story. As it is, we understand that the topic of the story is the reaction of different people to the preaching of the Word of God. The Word that is sowed into the human heart and the reaction to the preaching depends on the condition of the heart.

In interpreting a parable, we must be careful not to look for a spiritual meaning in every detail of the story. It is obvious that the farmer did not intend the seed to fall on four different kinds of soil. Modern

²³³ Matt. 13:34,-35

²³⁴ Ps. 78:1,2

farming methods are more efficient and less wasteful than the way this farmer throws his seed around. But the way Jesus describes the method is the way farmers worked at that time in Israel. The purpose of sowing is to gather a harvest. The point of the story is to highlight conditions that prevent the fruit-bearing.

We may assume that most of the land was good soil, which had been plowed and readied for the seed to grow and mature. To suppose that the farmer would waste three-fourth of the seed on places that would not produce, would make no sense. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “The Palestinian sower sowed first and ploughed afterwards.”

But there are three examples in Jesus’ story of places that are unproductive because of their condition: the trodden path, the rocky ground and the place that has not been weeded of thorns and thistles before the sowing. All three represent a certain condition of an unresponsive human heart.

The trodden path in this story is not a planned route, made specifically for people to walk on. It is the result of people treading on the same spot over and over again. There is something in repetition that tends to dull the mind and make it immune to a healthy response.

I remember as a kid sleeping at my aunt’s house from which one could hear a train pass. The first night I slept there, the train woke me up. The second night I only stirred briefly and all the following nights I slept through the noise. Some people react like this to the preaching of the Gospel. We can get used to conviction of sin to the point where repentance becomes less and less urgent, until finally no need for repentance is felt.

The Pulpit Commentary quotes the impression of a visitor to Palestine, who thinking of Jesus’ parable, watched the landscape he traveled through and reported: “There was the undulating corn-field descending to the water’s edge; there was the trodden pathway running through the midst of it, with no fence or hedge to prevent the seed from falling here and there on either side of it, or upon it; itself hard with the constant tramp of horse and mule and human foot.”

Jesus probably had the Pharisees and doctors of the law in mind at this point in the story. It is easy to become professional in spiritual things and lose one’s first love of God. The professionals knew the Word of God by heart and they had been dulled to the point where, when the Living Word came, they could not recognize it. They had separated the Word of God from the love for God. Their hearts were barren.

C. S. Lewis warns against hearing the Gospel and not responding to it. He compares it to an inoculation against a certain sickness. We are injected by a few microbes of the sickness, not enough to make us sick, but enough to build up resistance against it.

The picture of the birds that come and pick up the seed shows what Satan thinks about the Word of God. He is so afraid of the effect it can have upon the human soul, that he doesn’t dare to leave even one grain of it.

The rocky ground is a place where a thin layer of dirt covers a rock. From the surface it is not visible how thick the layer is. It looks like good ground with enough moisture. The seed would begin to grow faster on it, since the conditions seem to be ideal. Had the farmer plowed that part, he would have discovered the rock and spared the seed for other places. In His explanation of the image to the disciples, Jesus does not suggest a solution to the problem of the human heart that is represented. We understand that the Word of God can only bear fruit within us if our heart is broken.

Hosea had the same picture in mind when he prophesied: “Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.”²³⁵ And David wrote: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”²³⁶

When we speak of a broken heart, we think of tragedies, of loss of loved ones by death. In the two examples, mentioned above, the broken heart is the heart that confesses sin and repents. For the Word of God to bear fruit in us there must be the brokenness of repentance. The rock within us must be broken up for the fruit of the Spirit to grow.

²³⁵ Hos. 10:12

²³⁶ Ps. 51:17

We must bear in mind that the topic of the parable is not salvation, but fruit bearing. There may, however, be an element of eternal loss in the example of the trodden path. But if we try to preserve as much of self as we can in our relationship with the Word of God, we may also be in danger of losing it all!

In a way, the second picture of the parable represents us all. By nature we all have hearts of stone that are unable to respond to the love of God. We cannot change our own heart simply by willpower. Twice in Ezekiel, God promises that He will perform the operation for us if we are willing to accept. We read: “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.” And: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”²³⁷ There can be no repentance without the help of the Holy Spirit. And He is eager to bring about in us what we ask Him to do. He knows what to do with the rock within us.

Most of us will more easily identify ourselves with the third picture in the story, where the seed falls among the thorns. In His explanation of this vignette to His disciples, Jesus identifies the thorns as “life’s worries, riches and pleasures.”

I grew up in a family that had been hard hit by the depression of the early 1930s. Worry about money was a common experience. My mother’s life consisted of a continuing struggle to make ends meet when my father lost his business as representative of a textile industry. I found it difficult to see worry as a sin, since it was part of daily life. The root of worry is a lack of faith in God’s provision for our needs. Jesus’ admonition in Matthew was not the motto of daily life for us: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”²³⁸

The Word of God will not grow and bear fruit in the presence of worry. Because worry expresses a lack of confidence in God’s provision. There are many people who can testify that God performed miracles of support and sustenance in their lives, because they turned their worry over to Him, who loves and cares. George Mueller built a monument of glory for God in establishing his orphanages in Bristol, England, simply in taking seriously the verse “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”²³⁹

An even greater danger than worry over poverty is expressed by the thorns as symbols of riches and ease. Most people, if the choice were set before them between poverty and riches, would choose money. A popular TV show was called “Who wants to be a millionaire?” Possessing riches makes a person independent, both from his fellowmen and from God. Why would a rich person pray and ask for God’s help if he has enough money to pay for whatever he wants? The Scottish writer, George MacDonald, once asked the question: “Do you believe that God can punish someone by making him rich?” Agur son of Jakeh prayed one of the most profound prayers found in *The Book of Proverbs*: “Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’

²³⁷ Ezek. 11:19; 36:26,27

²³⁸ Matt. 6:25-34

²³⁹ Ps. 68:5

Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”²⁴⁰ Jesus may have had Agur’s word in mind when He taught His disciples to pray: “Give us today our daily bread.”²⁴¹

Actually, God never makes people rich; He loans them money. They owe Him an account of the way they handle His trust. God can only trust us if we trust Him. Money can choke the life out of a person.

Paul has the following to say to his son Timothy, regarding rich people in the church: “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”²⁴²

The fourth part of the parable describes the good land that receives the seed and brings forth fruit. We may assume that this is most of the land that was being sown. In life in the world, those who really bring forth fruit for the Lord, are a small and often pitiful minority. As far as God is concerned, they are His actually property. Not a small patch of land, but most of the world. In *Matthew’s Gospel* Jesus says: “The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom.”²⁴³

The heart of those who receive the seed and produce fruit is described with the two Greek words *kalos*, “morally good,” and *agathos* in the sense of “beneficial.” We find the last word in the verse: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”²⁴⁴

In concluding, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states about the meaning of this parable: “There are two ways of understanding this parable. One sees it as encouraging disciples with the contrast between the small beginnings and the ultimate rich harvest (which may be ‘the eschatological success’ of Jesus’ preaching ...). Despite the vicissitudes of the seeds that fell in unproductive places, the final result is impressive. The other emphasizes the importance of a right reaction to hearing the word. If we take it in, a rich harvest results, but if we react like the path, the rock, or the thorns, we finish with nothing. There is more to be said for the second view. Tinsley argues from the prominence given to this parable and its explanation in all three Synoptics that it is especially significant. Of the explanation he says, ‘It is as near as Jesus ever comes to “explaining” himself and his mission ... Jesus sees his mission as a way of speaking and acting which will give men the greatest opportunity to respond to the word of God.’”

One small difference between Luke’s version of this parable and that of the other two Synoptics is that Luke describes a harvest of one hundred percent, while the others mention “a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”²⁴⁵ Luke may have been influenced by the results of Paul’s ministry as an apostle to the whole world.

P. The lamp and the cover 8:16-18

16 *“No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light.*

17 *For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.*

18 *Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”*

²⁴⁰ Prov. 30:7-9

²⁴¹ Matt. 6:11

²⁴² I Tim. 6:9,10, 17-19

²⁴³ Matt. 13:38

²⁴⁴ James 1:17

²⁴⁵ Matt. 13:8; Mark 4:20

Jesus must have used the picture of the hiding of a lamp more than once.²⁴⁶ In Matthew and Mark we find it only once. Matthew quotes it in the context of *The Sermon on the Mount*.²⁴⁷ Mark, like Luke here, puts it at the end of the parable of the sower.

The obvious lesson in the picture of the lamp is that truth ought not to be covered. The light of the lamp is a physical image of a spiritual reality. Where natural light is needed for sight, spiritual light is the agent of insight. As Jesus finished the parable of the sower, He said: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Both the ear and the eye are organs that allow us to interpret what we hear and see. What Jesus emphasizes is the need to apply the lesson of the parable. Understanding that the Word of God is preached, not merely to be heard but to produce fruit, must lead us to pray God to make us people who bear fruit for Him. God’s truth must become the most vital element of our daily life. It must demonstrate itself in our behavior so that people will come and ask us questions about the hope we have. Peter advises: “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”²⁴⁸ And Paul, using the same image Jesus used here, writes: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.”²⁴⁹

One classic example of light that was hidden and then revealed is in the story of Gideon. Gideon’s men were given empty jars in which a burning torch was hidden. At the blowing of Gideon’s trumpet the jars were smashed and the light was revealed. The Midianite enemy was defeated by the light.²⁵⁰ Jesus may have had Gideon’s story in mind when He spoke these words.

Light in Old and New Testament times was provided by a little lamp consisting of a clay dish with olive oil and a wick. In the tabernacle and temple the light that shone in the holy place was provided by the candlestick, or menorah with seven lamps. *The Fausset’s Bible Dictionary* describes the one that stood in the tabernacle as “made of a talent of pure gold, symbolizing preciousness and sacredness and incorruptibility (Ex 25:31-39); of beaten work, 5 feet high and 3 ½ between the outside branches, according to the rabbis. An upright central stem, with three branches on one side and three on the other, still to be seen represented on the arch of Titus at Rome, erected after his triumph over Jerusalem. On the central shaft were four almond shaped bowls, four round knobs, and four flowers, i.e. 12 in all; on each of the six branches three bowls, three knobs, and three flowers, i.e. 54 on the six, and adding the 12 of the shaft, 66 in all. ... It stood in the tabernacle ‘without the veil’ that shut in the holiest.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on the picture Jesus uses: “Truth is like a light; it cannot be kept secret if it is to be useful.”

One interesting fact in the use of this image, immediately after the telling of the first parable, is that Jesus’ change of method of teaching was, in a sense, a kind of hiding of the light. In His explanation of the parable to the disciples, Jesus said: “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, ‘though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.’” We could, therefore, call Jesus’ public statement about hiding the light, paradoxical.

But there is much more in this statement than there seems to be. God had chosen Israel out of all the nations of the world. He had revealed Himself to them to become a kingdom of priests.²⁵¹ He had given to Israel the ministry of being God’s lamp in the darkness of the world. Israel’s history had been one of hiding God’s light in a jar or under a bed. The Apostle Paul wrote about them as a nation: “Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.”²⁵² But as light-bearers to the world they had failed miserably. And when the One came, who

²⁴⁶ See Luke 11:33; 12:2.

²⁴⁷ Matt. 5:15

²⁴⁸ I Peter 3:15

²⁴⁹ Eph. 5:8-10

²⁵⁰ Judg. 7:16-23

²⁵¹ Ex. 19:6

²⁵² Rom. 9:4

said: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”²⁵³ they crucified Him.

The Biblical Illustrator inserts a comment on “the place and function of the lamp” by S. Cox: “We see at a glance that this parable throws some light on the social customs of the age and land in which it was spoken. It reminds us, for instance, that in Palestine, as indeed in ancient Greece and Rome, when the darkness fell, little lamps, containing oil and a wick, were brought into the rooms of all classes of the people and placed on slender stands, commonly some two or three feet high, to give light to all who were in the house. Our Lord uttered this parable to teach us that no man is illuminated for his own sake, just as no lamp is lit for its own sake. Just as the lamp is lit that it may shine, so we are taught that we may teach. No truth is a private possession, just as no truth is of any private interpretation.

‘Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, ‘twere all alike,
As if we had them not.’

No truth is, or can be, dangerous. All that we can learn, we may learn. All that we have learned we are bound to teach; all that we have received we are bound to give. To conceal from others any truth which we ourselves have been taught of God is to hide the lamp that has come to us under a bushel or under a couch, instead of setting it under a lampstand.”

Q. Jesus’ mother and brothers 8:19-21

19 *Now Jesus’ mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd.*

20 *Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.”*

21 *He replied, “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.”*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, makes the following comment on these verses: “The other Synoptists place this little incident before the parable of the sower (though neither says explicitly that it preceded it in time). It is not unlikely that Luke has placed it here because of the way it illustrates the parables. His account is the shortest of the three and omits details such as Jesus looking round on the disciples and stretching out his hand to them. Luke concentrates on the saying. He tells us that Jesus’ mother and brothers came to see him, but were prevented from approaching by the crowd. The most natural understanding of Jesus’ *brothers* is that they were children of Joseph and Mary. Theologians in the Catholic tradition usually hold that Mary was perpetually virgin and explain this as a reference to children of Joseph by an earlier marriage or perhaps to cousins of Jesus. There is little evidence for such views and we should hold to the natural meaning. In the family’s implied claim that Jesus ought to be available to them there is perhaps a hint of possessiveness. But Jesus makes it clear that he is now given over to the work of ministry. His mother and brothers are *those who hear the word of God and do it*. The reference to hearing (absent from Matthew and Mark) comes in appropriately after the parable of the sower. But the stress is on doing. Those who are near to Jesus are those who take seriously their duty to God. This does not mean that family ties are unimportant or can be ignored: Jesus is not disowning his family. He thought of his mother even when he hung on the cross in the agony of achieving the world’s redemption (John 19:26f.). His meaning is that our duty to God takes precedence of all else.”

The incident stresses the fact that Jesus was perfectly human and that, at least at this point in His ministry, no one thought of Him as other than that. He had a mother and was related to other people who were known in the area. No one had come to the point where Thomas came after Jesus’ death and resurrection, where he exclaimed: “My Lord and my God!”²⁵⁴

The author of Hebrews emphasizes Jesus’ humanity in connection with His sacrificial death on the cross. In order to die for the sins of the world, Jesus needed a mortal human body. He inherited that from His mother. We read in Hebrews: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so

²⁵³ John 8:12

²⁵⁴ John 20:28

that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”²⁵⁵

Had Mary been sinless, as the Catholic doctrine teaches, Jesus would not have been able to die Himself.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “St. Mark, in his third chapter, gives us the reasons which led to this scene. It had been bruited abroad that a species of frenzy had seized upon that strange Man who had been brought up in their midst, and who had lately aroused such enthusiasm in all the crowded lake-district of Galilee. It is difficult to estimate aright the feelings of his own family towards him; admiration and love seem to have struggled in their hearts with prejudice and jealousy — not in the case of Mary, but in the case of the so-called brothers. They seem ever to have been close to him during his public ministry, not among his ‘own,’ but still near him, watching him, and listening to him with a half-wondering, half-grudging admiration. But John tells us (... John 7:5) that they did not believe in him. It needed the Resurrection to convert them. The crowd round the Master at this juncture was so great that they — his kinsmen — could not press through it to speak to him. They conveyed to him, however, a message. The Heart-reader knew well what were the motives which induced them to come to him just then; the brothers were so distrustful that they had suffered themselves to be carried away by the Pharisees’ evil surmises, that Jesus was possessed by a devil. The mother, influenced by her earthly fears for her Son, was induced to accompany the brothers, no doubt hoping to induce him to withdraw himself from the scene of excitement, at all events for a season.” The Commentary’s conclusion that Jesus’ family thought He had an evil spirit sounds questionable. It may be based upon the fact that in Mark’s Gospel the family visit is recorded right after the insinuation made by others.²⁵⁶

The essence of Jesus’ answer is that there is a relationship with Him that supersedes even those of blood-relations. Those who hear God’s Word and obey it are closer to Him than even His own mother and siblings. Jesus sets Himself here as an example of how to relate to the Father. We read in The Book of Proverbs: “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”²⁵⁷ And Jesus says to us: “I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”²⁵⁸ In the case of Jesus’ relation with His immediate family, water was thicker than blood.

R. The stilling of the storm 8:22-25

22 *One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s go over to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and set out.*

23 *As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.*

24 *The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.*

25 *“Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”*

We find the same story recorded in Matthew and Mark²⁵⁹ with only slight differences. As in the preceding event, the incident emphasizes Jesus’ humanity, although that was not the way the disciples interpreted the occurrence. Luke does not indicate at what time in Jesus’ ministry this journey was made. Mark places it immediately after the sermon in which the parables were introduced.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states about the lake: “The east side of the lake was largely uninhabited. Jesus wanted to get away from the crowds in order to rest and to talk with his disciples.” There had been the strain of opposition as well as the presence of the crowd that kept the company from being able to relax.

²⁵⁵ Heb. 2:14,15

²⁵⁶ See Mark 3:30-34.

²⁵⁷ Prov. 18:24

²⁵⁸ John 15:15

²⁵⁹ Matt. 8:23-34; Mark 4:35-41

So Jesus decided to take time out with His disciples. The fact that He fell asleep in the boat shows that Jesus was subject to fatigue that made His body require repose.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states about the Lake of Gennesaret, or the Sea of Galilee: “The sea lies in the deep trough of the Jordan valley, almost due East of the Bay of Acre. The surface is 680 ft. below the level of the Mediterranean. It varies in depth from 130 ft. to 148 ft., being deepest along the course of the Jordan ... From the point where the Jordan enters in the North to its exit in the South is about 13 miles. The greatest breadth is in the North, from el-Mejdel to the mouth of Wady Semak being rather over 7 miles. It gradually narrows toward the South, taking the shape of a gigantic pear, with a decided bulge to the West.”

In order to cross the lake from Capernaum to Gergesa, which is where the following story takes place, the boat had to sail from the Northwest side of the lake to the Eastern shore. The diagonal line would be a little less than 10 miles across.

The Greek text reads literally: “But as they sailed He fell asleep.” The Greek verb used is *pleo*, which does not necessarily refer to the use of a sail. It conveys “the idea of plunging through the water.” The disciples could have been rowing.

All of a sudden a storm came up and transformed the quiet lake into a boiling pot. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains: “The lake lies 680 feet below sea level and is surrounded by hills. As the air on the heights cools toward the end of the day, it flows down through the defiles of the hills to the lake surface and churns it into foam.”

While working as a missionary in Papua, I often thought of this story as I had to cross the largest of the three Wissel lakes, which is a mountain lake, approximately 5600 feet above sea level. Almost every day the wind would fall upon the lake around noon and crossing it in a canoe with a small outboard motor was an interesting experience.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “The disciples woke Jesus with the words, *Master, Master, we are perishing!* Luke omits the rebuke implied in Mark’s ‘do you not care if we perish?’ and the entreaty in Matthew’s ‘Save, Lord.’ All three tell us that Jesus rebuked the wind (cf. Ps. 106:9). The verb may imply that there was an evil force behind the storm. Be that as it may, the result was *a calm*. Jesus’ mastery over the elements was complete (cf. Ps. 89:9).”

The text of the above Bible reference reads: “You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.” In quoting that verse in the Psalms, Morris suggests that Jesus acted here by using His divine authority. That seems inconsistent with His rebuke to the disciples: “Where is your faith?” There is rather a strong suggestion in Jesus’ words that He appealed to the Father to restore the lake to its normal condition and that He was heard because of His perfect and unwavering faith. At another time, Jesus said about the relationship between prayer and faith: “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”²⁶⁰ This leads us to believe that Jesus acted here as a human being who exercised His God-given right over creation, the authority God had given to Adam, which was lost when mankind fell into sin.

The miracle Jesus performed here was the same kind as demonstrated in His walking on the water. In that case also, Jesus reproached Peter, not because he tried to walk on water but because of his lack of faith.²⁶¹

The disciples were experienced fishermen and this will not have been the first or only time in their lives that they were caught in a storm on this lake. Yet, the intensity of the storm must have been unusually great, because they feared for their lives. And Morris’ suggestion that this storm may have been particularly demon inspired, is worthy of consideration.

²⁶⁰ Mark 11:23,24

²⁶¹ Matt. 14:31

We could ask the question if all natural disasters are the work of the devil. It is obvious that God did not create our planet with the intent that it would harm its inhabitants. Although insurance companies may label certain events as an “act of God,” it might be more accurate to ascribe them to the enemy.

S. The Gerasene demoniac 8:26-39

1. The exorcism 8:26-33

26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee.

27 When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.

28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!”

29 For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

30 Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him.

31 And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission.

33 When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

The same story is told by Matthew and Mark²⁶² with little difference in detail. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: “*The country of the Gerasenes* presents us with a problem, for Gerasa was about 40 miles south-east of the lake. Matthew has ‘the country of the Gadarenes,’ but Gadara is 6 miles away and separated by a deep gorge of the Yarmuk. All three synoptists have both variants and also a third, ‘the country of the Gergesenes.’ This reading was favored by Origen, who saw the other two places as too distant and thought that the readings had arisen only because scribes did not know of the small town Gergesa, so substituted names they knew ... Modern students point to the village of Khersa and think this may retain the ancient name. This may be right, but the suspicion remains that the reading is found in the MSS only because Origen originated it. If either of the others is correct, we must understand that the city in question controlled a tract of land bordering the lake. As Jesus reached land in this territory he was met by a demoniac. The unfortunate man wore no clothes and lived among the tombs.”

This case of demon possession is unusual. We understand, both from the name “Legion” and from the number of pigs that rushed into the lakes that, according to Mark, there were about 2,000 of them.²⁶³ A legion in the Roman army consisted of a large group of between 3000 to 6000 troops. Bible scholars, however, believe that the word is used to indicate a large number, not an exact count.

As Jesus arrived at the shore the demon possessed man came to Him. This suggests that the man had some control over his actions. We assume that, if possession had been absolute, the demons would have forced the man to flee or stay in hiding. It is obvious that the demons did not want to be exorcised. According to Matthew, there were two demon possessed men.²⁶⁴ Most Bible scholars believe that the man described by Mark and Luke was the worst of the two and that, consequently, the story of only that one is recorded in their Gospels.

Demons do not have the power to kill; they may suggest that the person they inhabit commit suicide, but, evidently, they cannot enforce this. The fact that the poor guy lived among the tombs in a graveyard,

²⁶² Matt. 8:28-32; Mark 5:1-13

²⁶³ Mark 5:13

²⁶⁴ Matt. 8:28-34

surrounded by death, may have been the closest they could bring him to the point where he would wish to end his own life and join the decayed bodies that surrounded him.

Death and devils go together. Death is the wages of sin. Death is as much God's enemy as it is ours. According to the Apostle Paul, death is "the last enemy to be destroyed."²⁶⁵

The condition of this poor fellow was indeed very pitiful. The demons had robbed him of all his human dignity, making him go around naked and so wild and strong that no chain had been enough to fetter him. Roaming around among the tombs, he was probably half starved also.

As soon as Jesus sees him, He commands the demons to leave the man. The demons, although, they spoke with one voice, argued with Jesus, revealing that they recognized Him for who He was: "Son of the Most High God." This is one of the rare cases in which Jesus allowed the demons to speak. The conversation also indicates that Jesus had to ask questions in order to get information, proving that, as a human being, our Lord did not exercise His omniscience.

Jesus' question was "What is your name?" The demon answered by not giving a name, but a number. The human being they had invaded must have had a name, but they had reduced his human dignity by robbing him of his identity. The inmates of the Nazi concentration camps in World War II were reduced to the same kind of inhuman treatment. Numbers were branded on their skin and names were not used. God honors us by calling us by our name. Isaiah writes: "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."²⁶⁶

After having confessed to Jesus that they were a certain number of demons, they pleaded not to be sent back to their place of origin. Evidently, Satan is a hard taskmaster for his own minions and demons that do not fulfill the work they have been sent for to do on earth, are in for severe treatment.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on this conversation between Jesus and the demons: "In this form of possession one remarkable and very terrible feature seems to have been the divided consciousness; the sufferer identifies himself with the demons, and now one speaks, now the other. St. Matthew adds a dread detail to this petition to the Lord, '*before the time:*' the evil spirits thus recognizing a period when certain torment would be their hapless destiny. The expression 'torment' meets us in the parable of Lazarus; the dwelling-place of the rich man after death is *a place of torment*. In ... Matthew 18:34 the ministers of judgment are the *tormentors*. One very solemn reason why this special case of exorcism on the part of our Lord is related with so much detail and repeated by the three evangelists, SS. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, seems to be the glimpse which the dialogue between the evil spirits and the Master opens to us of the dread realities hidden in the future for those who sin *deliberately* against the will of God. The existence of the place or state of torment is affirmed very pointedly by our Lord and his disciples; but having done this they dwell but little on it. There is a striking and solemn quotation in Dr. Morrison's 'Commentary on St. Mark' on this clear but guarded reference to the final sufferings of those who will not be submissive to the moral will of God, 'Further curiosity as to the *when*, the *where*, and the *how*, does not become beings whose main business and greatest wisdom is to fly from, not to pry too close into, these terrible secrets of the dark kingdom.'"

It almost sounds as if the demons tried a form of blackmail in their request not to be sent into the Abyss. Israelites were not allowed to raise pigs, as they were animals that were ceremonially unclean and could not be eaten by Jews. The people of the region may have been non-Israelites, or possibly they did not raise pigs for their own consumption, but for sale to people who were not under the Jewish law. In that case they were like tobacco companies that warn against the danger of smoking, but sell cigarettes at the same time. Also, the subsequent drowning of the whole herd of pigs made Jesus rather unpopular to the people of the area. They came and asked Jesus to leave. No reason is given as to why Jesus consented. He could have refused and sent the demons back to the abyss. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The request is a strange one, and suggests much anxious thought. What is the abyss these rebel-spirits dreaded with so great a dread? It would seem as though, to use Godet's thought, that for beings alienated from God, the power of acting on the world is a temporary solace to their unrest, and that to be deprived of this power is for them just what a return to prison is for the captive. St. Mark's expression here is a curious one. He represents the spirits

²⁶⁵ I Cor 15:26

²⁶⁶ Isa. 49:16

requesting Jesus ‘not to send them away out of the country.’ The two accounts put together tell us that these spirits were aware, if they were driven out of the country — whatever that expression signified, this earth possibly — they must go out into the deep, the abyss, what is called ‘the bottomless pit’ in ... Revelation 9:1, 2, 11. Any doom seemed to these lost ones preferable to *that*. The whole train of thought suggested by the incident and the words of the Lord is very terrible. We see at least one reason *why* the first preachers of the Word have selected *this* exorcism. It indeed lifts a bit of the curtain which hangs between us and the night of endless woe!”

We don’t know what happened to the demons when the pigs drowned. Obviously, it did not mean the end of them, because angels cannot die, even if they are fallen ones. The drowning of the herd caused panic among those tending them. We don’t read how many people were involved. As the town’s people came to the scene, they found Jesus and the disciples with the man who had been demon possessed. Luke describes him as “sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind.” It has been said that this made the man who had been demon possessed a picture of all who follow the Lord. No explanation is given as to where this man found clothing. It could be that he retrieved his own clothes that he had disregarded before in his previous condition.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on the people’s reaction: “With all the evidence before them that a great miracle had been wrought, these people proceeded to reject the greatest opportunity of their lives. Instead of welcoming Jesus, the liberator from demons, they, *seized with great fear*, asked him to leave. So he left. Their fear may have been a superstitious reaction to the supernatural power that had so evidently been in operation. It may also have been associated with the material loss involved in the destruction of the pigs. If so, they saw Jesus as a disturbing person, more interested in saving people than in material prosperity. It was more comfortable to ask him to go.”

The town’s people had a choice. They had to choose between emotional and spiritual welfare, as exemplified in the man who sat at Jesus’ feet, and material prosperity. They chose the latter. To them pigs were more important than people. In choosing the pigs, one wonders if the demons had really left the area. Their influence still lingered.

It was different with the man who had been possessed; he pleaded with Jesus to be allowed to leave with Him. Jesus refused this request and told him: “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on this: “The Lord did not repudiate him, but gave him a commission to discharge. He became an effective witness to the Savior’s power.” The man became one of Jesus’ apostles in the town. He did not even have to go around and preach; the fact that he had been with Jesus and was in his right mind was enough of a testimony to the people who had known him as demon possessed.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “The restored man longed to remain with his Deliverer, but this was not permitted — the great Teacher bade him stay behind in his own country. Perhaps, thought the Redeemer, ‘some of these hardhearted Gadarenes will be won by his testimony — one of themselves, too, and so notorious a sufferer.’ His work, the Master told him, was *there* among his own people; so he stayed, and the next verse (39) tells us how he worked as a diligent evangelist. It is noteworthy how the Master referred the great act of deliverance to *God*. But to the restored, Jesus was at once his Deliverer and his God. The text of his preaching was ‘how great things Jesus had done unto him.’”

T. The daughter of Jairus 8:40-56

1. The request for healing 8:40-42a

40 Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him.

41 Then a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus’ feet, pleading with him to come to his house

42 because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.

The story of the resurrection of Jairus’ daughter is told in all three Synoptic Gospels. There is a slight difference in each of the three reports. According to Matthew, the girl was already dead when Jairus knelt

before Jesus with his request.²⁶⁷ In Mark we read that Jairus received report that his little girl had just died while he was speaking with Jesus. Some people came and said: “Your daughter is dead, why bother the teacher any more?”²⁶⁸ Mark’s version sounds as the most precise.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes the following about the apparent contradiction: “When Jesus returned he found a welcome from a waiting crowd (a marked contrast from the attitude of the Gerasenes, v.17). Among them was a man named Jairus (the Old Testament Jair, Num. 32:41). He was *a ruler of the synagogue*, i.e. the official who was responsible for the arrangements at the synagogue services. He would select, for example, those who would lead in prayer, read the Scripture and preach. He was thus a man of eminence in the community. Jairus prostrated himself before Jesus and *besought him to come to his house*. He *had an only daughter* (we owe to Luke the information that she was an only child), *about twelve years of age, who was dying*. Luke does not mention any specific request, but a plea for healing is clearly implicit in Jairus’s words. Mark says that he asked Jesus to lay hands on her for healing. But the real problem lies with Matthew, who gives Jairus’s words as ‘My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her and she will live.’ This is probably to be explained, not as contradicting Mark and Luke, but as arising from the very abbreviated character of Matthew’s account. The other two speak first of Jairus as coming to Jesus and telling him that his daughter was at the point of death. Later there came a messenger with word that the girl had died. Matthew shortens the story by running both into one.”

2. The woman with the hemorrhage 8:42b-48

42 *As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him.*

43 *And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her.*

44 *She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.*

45 *“Who touched me?” Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.”*

46 *But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.”*

47 *Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.*

48 *Then he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”*

While Jesus was on the way, evidently trying to work His way through the crowd and being pushed and hustled by everyone, another incident took place. A woman, who had suffered for twelve years from menstrual bleeding, came and touched the edge of Jesus’ cloak. Both Matthew and Mark state what the woman had said to herself: “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.”²⁶⁹ Mark also provides us with a detail that Luke omits: “She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.”²⁷⁰ Luke’s professional pride kept him from blaming his fellow physicians for their failure.

According to the Levitical law, the woman’s illness made her ceremonially unclean.²⁷¹ It made her the same kind of outcast as a leper. Anyone who touched her inadvertently would become unclean. She should not even be seen in public. What she did by touching Jesus was literally against the law.

To come to Jesus and ask to be healed would have been embarrassing, seen the character of her illness.

The Pulpit Commentary states about the part of Jesus’ cloak the woman touched: “The border of the Lord’s garment which the woman touched was one of the four tassels which formed part of the Jewish tallith, or mantle; one of these was always arranged so as to hang down over the shoulder at the back; it was this one which the sufferer’s fingers grasped. There was a certain sacredness about these tassels, as being

²⁶⁷ Matt. 9:18

²⁶⁸ Mark 5:35

²⁶⁹ Matt. 9:21; Mark 5:25

²⁷⁰ Mark 5:26

²⁷¹ Lev. 15:25-27

part of the memorial dress enjoined by the Levitical Law, which, no doubt, induced the woman to touch this particular portion of the Savior's dress."

The woman must have thought that Jesus would be unaware of being touched, since the crowd was pressing around Him. But Jesus felt a surge of power that went from His body to the person who touched Him. Even Luke, the physician, makes no effort to explain that phenomenon.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: "There is a mystery here. Could power go out of Jesus at any touch? Could power go forth in such a way that he was quite unaware of who received it and what the power was for? This seems unlikely. It is easier to hold that Jesus knew quite well what had happened and that this seems to be the meaning of the later words 'the woman saw that she was not hidden' (47). He wanted to bring the woman out into the open. More than one reason is apparent. It was good for her, indeed it was necessary for her that her cure be widely known. All her acquaintances must have been aware of her permanent state of ceremonial uncleanness. If she was to be received back into normal religious and social intercourse, it was necessary that her cure become a matter of public knowledge. So Jesus took steps to see that people knew what had happened. It is probable also that he wanted to do something else for the woman. It is difficult to deny that there was an element of superstition in her idea that a touch of Jesus' tassel would bring healing. A conversation with her enabled Jesus both to show her that it was her faith that counted and to establish a personal relationship. The words also seem to indicate that he did not heal without some cost to himself. Power went out from him."

There is one point at which I respectfully disagree with this author. I believe that Jesus did not know who touched Him and that His question was a genuine request for information. It was part of becoming human, that Jesus did not know what the Father had not specifically revealed to Him. Peter's reaction to Jesus' question indicates that the disciples did not believe that Jesus was omniscient as He walked among them. The powers and attributes of His divinity were returned to Him at His resurrection; but until then He lived within the limitations in which all human beings spent their lives on earth, except for sin. It was the woman's faith, rather than her superstition, that cause power to surge from Jesus' body into hers and brought about the instant healing.

The whole story is a beautiful illustration of the way a life can be transformed. The crowd pressed upon Jesus and those who touched Him unintentionally remained untouched by His power. It was the intentional touch of the woman, the faith that something would happen to her, that brought about the miracle. Some people have been maimed or even killed by unintentionally touching an electrical wire. Even in the spiritual realm people become affected by sin, often without meaning to be polluted. If we brush against a freshly painted fence or wall, paint will spoil or clothes, whether we want to or not. But God's power does not work that way in the human heart. It is only if, with the persistence of Jacob, we say to God: "I will not let you go unless you bless me,"²⁷² that transformations take place.

This story may be the only incident in Scripture in which a person in need knew what happened and the Savior did not. That is another feature that makes it so unique.

The Greek word used for "power" that was released from Jesus' body upon the woman's touch is *dunamis*. The word is translated differently in various versions. *The King James Version* uses here "virtue." *The New Living Translation* reads: "Someone deliberately touched me, for I felt healing power go out from me." *The Living Bible* uses "healing power." In some context the word is used for "miracles," as in the verse: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many *miracles*?'"²⁷³

Jesus' question put the woman in the embarrassing condition of having to confess publicly what she had done and why she had done it. She probably expected that Jesus for reprimand her. But instead, He commends her and sends her away with a blessing. For years she probably believed that her illness was proof of God's disapproval of her. Her healing, obtained by faith, proved that God loved her.

²⁷² Gen. 32:26

²⁷³ Matt. 7:22

3. Jairus' daughter raised from the dead 8:49-56

49 While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “Your daughter is dead,” he said. “Don’t bother the teacher any more.”

50 Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.”

51 When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child’s father and mother.

52 Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. “Stop wailing,” Jesus said. “She is not dead but asleep.”

53 They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.

54 But he took her by the hand and said, “My child, get up!”

55 Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat.

56 Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

As was noted before, Matthew tells the story as if the girl had already died when Jairus approached Jesus.²⁷⁴ Mark and Luke state that someone from the synagogue came to tell Jairus that his daughter had died, probably during the interruption caused by the woman’s healing. The messenger adds: “Don’t bother the teacher any more,” saying virtually: “It is too late now!” As far as we know only one resurrection had occurred so far, the raising of the widow’s son at Nain.²⁷⁵ But that had happened in Judea and, evidently, that news had not yet reached Galilee.

Overhearing the conversation, Jesus says to Jairus: “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.” The Greek word used for “healed” is *sozo*, which is derived from a word that means “safe.” We find it in the verse: “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”²⁷⁶

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states about the following conversation: “Jairus said nothing, but Jesus overheard the words and immediately told him to stop worrying. *Only believe*, he said, *and she shall be well*. If we can press Luke’s use of the aorist tense, *believe* means something like ‘make an act of faith,’ ‘put your trust in me’ (though we should not overlook Mark’s present, ‘keep believing’; both stress the importance of faith at this moment). Jesus certainly made it clear to the ruler of the synagogue that in the fact of the disaster that had hit him he must have faith. Nothing else mattered.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Jairus’ emotions caused by the interruption by the woman: “This interruption, which must have occupied some time, was, no doubt, a sore trial to the ruler’s faith. His little daughter was, he knew well, dying; and though he trusted that the famous Rabbi had power to arrest the progress of disease, he never seems for a moment to have contemplated his wrestling with *death*; indeed, the bare thought of recalling the spirit to the deserted clay tenement evidently never occurred to any of that sad household, while the *hired* mourners (vers. 52, 53, and ... Mark 5:38), too accustomed to the sight of death in all its forms to dream of any man, however great a physician, recalling the dead to life, transgressing all courtesy, positively laughed him to scorn. It seems to us strange now that this supreme miracle should have seemed so much harder a thing to accomplish than the healing of blindness or deafness, or the creation of wine and bread and fish, or the instantaneous quieting of the elements, the waves, and the wind. While sufferers and their friends and the Lord’s disciples, in countless instances, asked him to put forth his power in cases of disease and sickness, neither friend nor disciple ever asked him to raise the dead to life. To the last, in spite of what they had seen, none, till after the Resurrection, could persuade themselves that he was, indeed, the Lord of death as well as of life.”

One indication of how much time seems to have been lost (if that is the right word in this context) is in the fact that when Jesus and His disciples reach Jairus’ home the mourners are already in place to do their work. *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states about mourners: “Paid professional mourners worked in

²⁷⁴ Matt. 9:18

²⁷⁵ See Luke 7:11-17

²⁷⁶ Matt. 1:21

the ancient world from very early times. They are called ‘mourning women’ and ‘skilled wailing women’ (Jer 9:17), ‘singing men’ and ‘singing women’ (2 Chron 35:25). These mourners sang or chanted funeral songs or dirges (Amos 5:16), accompanied by musical instruments (Matt 9:23).” In our Western society it may be difficult to imagine people making a profession of crying and wailing at funerals. There is often a world of superstition in regard to the fate of the deceased that calls for such public demonstrations of grief.

There is something very strange in the conversation between Jesus and the mourners. Jesus tells them to “stop wailing,” adding: “She is not dead but asleep.” Jesus used the same word in connection with the death and resurrection of Lazarus. We read in John’s Gospel: “After he had said this, he went on to tell them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.’ His disciples replied, ‘Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.’ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’”²⁷⁷ The suggestion by some Bible scholars, therefore, that Jairus’ daughter had not really died, is unfounded.

In connection with the same story as told in Mark’s Gospel,²⁷⁸ *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes about Jesus’ reference to the little girl’s death as being asleep: “Christ’s reference to death as sleep was intended to suggest that the condition was temporary and that the person would awaken again. The mourners, taking Jesus’ figure of speech literally, kept laughing (Gr. imp. tense) him to scorn. They knew that the girl was dead, and they were sure that death is permanent.” That may be the most acceptable explanation of this difficult passage.

It is true that, from our vantage point on earth, we have no clear concept of what happens to the human soul at the moment of death. We must be careful not to build a theological assumption on Jesus’ use of the word “sleep” here. To state that the soul sleeps, is unconscious, up to the moment of the resurrection of the body, needs more than Jesus’ enigmatic words here. The word “sleep” is used for death in *Daniel*, where we read: “Multitudes who *sleep* in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”²⁷⁹ But this may be no more than an idiomatic expression.

It is obvious from the reaction of the mourners at Jairus’ place that they took Jesus literally, thinking that He did not believe the girl to have really died. Being professionals, they knew what death looked like and so they mocked Jesus’ “ignorance.”

Jesus answered them by kicking them all out of the house. From Mark we learn that He did this more forcefully than we gather from Luke’s story. We read in Mark: “He put them all out.”²⁸⁰ The Greek word used there is *ekballo*, which literally means: “to eject.”

Luke leaves out several details we find in Mark’s Gospels, that only the girl’s parents and Jesus’ three disciples, Peter, John and James, went into the room. Mark also gives us the exact Aramaic words Jesus used: “‘Talitha koum!’ (which means, ‘Little girl, I say to you, get up!’).”²⁸¹ Those may have been the same words her mother or father would use every morning to get her out of bed. The simplicity of the event, accentuated by the words used, makes it seem as if calling someone back to life, was the easiest thing Jesus could do. In reality, this resurrection, as well as the raising of the widow’s son of Nain, and of Lazarus, were advances taken from the greatest victory Jesus would accomplish in His own death and resurrection. These two short Aramaic words were among the most costly ever spoken. The Son of God would have to conquer death in His own body in order to pay for this.

That may be the reason Jesus swore the girl’s parents to secrecy. “He ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.” The only way this could be done would be to perpetuate among the mourners who had been evicted from the scene, the idea that the girl had not been really dead, but had in fact been “asleep,” or unconscious.

²⁷⁷ John 11:11-15

²⁷⁸ Mark 5:40

²⁷⁹ Dan. 12:2

²⁸⁰ Mark 5:40

²⁸¹ Mark 5:41

U. The mission of the twelve 9:1-6

1 When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases,

2 and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

3 He told them: “Take nothing for the journey — no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic.

4 Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town.

5 If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them.”

6 So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.

Matthew and Mark also record this event,²⁸² but they include several details that Luke leaves out, or has already mentioned earlier. This commission was not the same as the one Jesus gave after His resurrection, when He instructed His disciples to “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”²⁸³ The disciples’ mission here was strictly limited to Israel. According to Matthew, Jesus said specifically: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.”²⁸⁴

The purpose of this campaign was, evidently, to bring Israel back to the call God had originally given them at the foot of Mount Sinai, where He had said: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”²⁸⁵ Israel had never understood God’s plan for them as a nation. They believed that God had revealed Himself to them because they were such special people. It is true what the Apostle Paul writes about them: “Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.”²⁸⁶ They were special people because of God’s presence. But God had not chosen them because they were special to begin with. The Jews had turned all this upside down. The main purpose of the disciples’ campaign was to restore the nation to what God intended it to be: “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

The campaign was also meant to teach the disciples a lesson of faith in God’s provision. They had to go out “by faith,” without a reserve of material support to sustain them on the way. They were to go as missionaries without an outfit.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on the simplicity of the preparation for this trip: “the Twelve were to travel light. Jesus told them to *take nothing* with them, and he spelled this out with *no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money*. They are to concentrate on the task in hand, not on elaborate preparations. In fact they are to forgo even what would have been regarded as normal preparations for a journey. God will provide what they need and they are to trust him for it, a trust which they later agreed was vindicated (22:35). There is a problem in *no staff*, for in the first instance it is not easy to see how this would in any way hinder the effectiveness of their preaching and healing, and in the second in Mark’s account they were to take nothing ‘except a staff’ (Mark 6:8). Various attempts have been made at harmonizing the two, such as the view that Luke means ‘no additional staff’ (but why would they want a spare staff?), or that we have variant translations of an Aramaic original (which was perhaps elliptical and might be filled out in more than one way). But so far no explanation seems really satisfactory). Perhaps both ways of putting it means ‘Go as you are.’ Jesus is instructing them to make no special preparation for this trip. The *bag* (*pēra*) was the ‘knapsack, traveler’s bag’ ... As they were to make no preparation such a bag was not needed. The need was urgent: they must simply go. Some, however, see the *pēra* as the beggar’s bag used, for example, by itinerant Cynic preachers. Some of these preachers seem to have made quite a good living by appealing to the public in this way. Jesus’ preachers were not to emulate such men. No second tunic fits in with the rest of the instructions. They were not to make even the simplest of preparations for their trip. Edersheim

²⁸² Matt. 10:1-42; Mark 6:7-13

²⁸³ Mark 16:15

²⁸⁴ Matt. 10:5,6

²⁸⁵ Ex. 19:5,6

²⁸⁶ Rom. 9:4,5

connects this with the rabbinic rule that one must not enter the temple precincts with staff, shoes and money-bag. ‘The symbolic reasons underlying this command would, in both cases, be probably the same: to avoid even the appearance of being engaged on other business, when the whole being should be absorbed in the service of the Lord.’”

One thing that is obvious from the Lord’s instructions is that habits of personal hygiene have changed over the centuries. For a Western individual it would be inconceivable to make an extended trip without taking a change of clothes. But that detail is the least important in this section of Scripture.

The Gospel, the disciples were instructed to preach was the same Jesus had begun to preach Himself: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”²⁸⁷ In order to preach this message, Jesus gave them “power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases.” The Greek text reads literally: “gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases.” The Greek words used are *dunamis*, literally “force,” often used in the sense of performing a miracle, and *exousia*, which is best taken in the sense of authority that comes with the office. “Jurisdiction” would be a good equivalent. One of the best illustrations of the latter is in the story of Esther where we read: “The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai.”²⁸⁸ Mordecai used that ring to sign executive orders issued in the name of the king of Persia. That kind of power and authority is included in the Name of Jesus. The Name of Jesus determines the effectiveness of our prayers.

According to *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, the phrase “Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town” means: “They were not to go from house to house in search of the most comfortable lodgings, but were to accept whatever was offered.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the shaking off of the dust from the feet as a testimony against those who rejected the message: “It was the custom of the Jews when they returned from foreign (Gentile) lands, as they crossed the frontiers of the Holy Land, to shake the dust from off their feet. This was an act symbolizing that they had broken, now on their return to their own land, all communion with Gentile peoples which a residence among them had necessitated for a season. The bitter hatred and loathing of the Jews, after their return from the Captivity, for all Gentile races can only be understood by the student of the Talmud. So comprehensive and perfect a hatred, enduring, too, for centuries, has never been witnessed in the ease of any other peoples. This accounts in great measure for the retaliatory persecution which more or less has been carried on all through the Christian era against this marvelous race. In our day the day of a liberalism possibly exaggerated and unreal — in many parts of Europe the untrained sense of the *masses* strangely revolts against this spirit of toleration; and wild excesses, massacres, and bitter persecution — the *Judenhetz*, hatred of the Jews in Germany and in Russia — are among the curious results of the liberality and universal toleration of the time.”

Paul and Barnabas performed this ritual literally in Antioch, Pisidia, when the Jews reacted with jealousy against the mass conversion of the Gentiles in their city.²⁸⁹

V. Herod the tetrarch 9:7-9

7 Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed, because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead,

8 others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life.

9 But Herod said, “I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?” And he tried to see him.

Matthew and Mark record in much greater detail the beheading of John the Baptist.²⁹⁰ Later in his Gospel, Luke will mention Herod again, when some Pharisees come to warn Jesus that the king wanted to kill Him and He replied: “Go tell that fox, ‘I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow,

²⁸⁷ Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:13

²⁸⁸ Est. 8:2

²⁸⁹ Act 13:51

²⁹⁰ Matt. 14:3-12; Mark 6:16-29

and on the third day I will reach my goal.’ In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day — for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!”²⁹¹ Herod’s curiosity about Jesus was finally satisfied when Pilate sent Jesus to him and his majesty and his soldiers ridiculed the King of glory.²⁹²

Herod the tetrarch is actually Herod Antipas. He ruled from 6-39 AD. *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* states about his character: “As a ruler he was regarded as ‘sly, ambitious, luxurious, but not so able as his father’ ... Of him Jesus said, ‘Go and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out demons’ (Luke 13:32). His administration was characterized throughout with cunning and crime. He was intensely selfish and utterly destitute of principle.”

W. The feeding of the five thousand 9:10-17

10 *When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida,*

11 *but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.*

12 *Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.”*

13 *He replied, “You give them something to eat.” They answered, “We have only five loaves of bread and two fish — unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.”*

14 *(About five thousand men were there.) But he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.”*

15 *The disciples did so, and everybody sat down.*

16 *Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people.*

17 *They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.*

Apart from the resurrection, the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle that is found in all four Gospels.²⁹³ Matthew and Mark place the incident immediately after Jesus had received word of the death of John the Baptist. In Luke’s version Jesus takes the Twelve with Him to relax after they returned from their evangelistic campaign.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary explains about Bethsaida that it was: “Not a barren waste, but uninhabited country. Bethsaida was a small town on the north shore of the lake, east of the inlet of the Jordan River, a moderate distance from the larger cities on the west side of the lake.”

The obvious intent of the trip was a change of venue where the group could have a quiet retreat and be spiritually and physically restored. We may see in the influx of the crowd an effort by Satan to rob Jesus and the disciples of that opportunity. The enemy of our soul may try to discourage us by preventing us to witness to individuals, or he may do the opposite in sending us so many people that we don’t know where to turn. The latter seems to be the case here. But Jesus received the crowd as being sent by the Father and in spite of the need of rest, He teaches and heals.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The excitement of the multitude about Jesus was now at its height. Directly after the discourse at Capernaum (John 6.), which immediately followed the great miracle we are about to discuss, the popular enthusiasm began to wane. Intensely weary, dispirited too at the story of the murder of John the Baptist, which was told the Master by the disciples and the friends of John on their return from their mission, Jesus determined for a brief space to withdraw himself from the public gaze. He crossed the Lake of Gennesaret in one of his friends’ fishing-boats to a town lately identified by modern

²⁹¹ Luke 13:32,33

²⁹² Luke 23:6-12

²⁹³ Matt. 14:15-21; Mark 6:35-44; John 6:5-13

research as Bethsaida Julias, a small city recently beautified by Herod Philip, and named Bethsaida Julias, after the daughter of Augustus. Bethsaida, ‘house of fish,’ was a name attached evidently to several of these fishing centers on the shores of the lake. Many of the multitude of whom we read subsequently in the account of the miracle, had watched his departure in the boat for the neighbourhood of Bethsaida Julias, and had gone on foot round the head of the lake to join the popular Teacher again. The distance round the north end of the lake from the point of embarkation, most likely Capernaum, to Bethsaida Julias is not very considerable. The crowd which soon joined him in retirement would be considerably swelled by many of the Passover pilgrims just arrived at Capernaum on their way to Jerusalem to keep the feast. These would be anxious, too, to see and to hear the great Galilaeen Prophet, whose name just then was in every mouth. Not very far from Bethsaida Julias there is a secluded plain, *El Batihah*; thither Jesus no doubt went after leaving his fishing-boat, purposing to spend some time in perfect rest. Soon, however, the usually quiet plain becomes populous with the crowds following after the Galilaeen Master. Though longing intensely for repose so necessary for himself and his disciples, he at once, moved by the eagerness of the multitude to hear and see him again, gives them his usual loving welcome, and begins in his old fashion to teach them many things, and to heal their sick.”

Matthew describes Jesus’ reaction to seeing the crowd as compassionate. Twice we read in his Gospel: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”²⁹⁴ And at another occasion when a similar miraculous feeding took place, we read that He said: “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”²⁹⁵

The disciples realized that, unless the crowd was dismissed early enough, they would have to travel back in the dark. Logistically, it was reasonable to suggest that Jesus would bring the meeting to a close early in the afternoon.

There is some similarity between the scene here and Israel’s desert journey from Egypt to Canaan. There was a crowd and there was no food. In John’s Gospel the analogy is actually brought up after the miracle had occurred, although not as a positive conclusion of what Jesus had done. Having experienced the miracle of the feeding, they asked for another one, saying: “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”²⁹⁶

When the disciples suggest that Jesus dismiss the crowd so they can go and find food somewhere, Jesus says: “You give them something to eat.” According to John, it is Jesus who brings the problem to the disciples’ attention, saying to Philip: “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” John adds: “He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.”²⁹⁷ Instead of seeing in this a contradiction, we assume that the disciples, or at least one of them, asked the question and Jesus answered by repeating the question.

Luke reports that there were five thousand men; unless this is meant generically, and there were women and children in the crowd also, there must have been more than twice that number of people. All the food that could be found was five loaves of bread and two small fish. According to John, there were “five small barley loaves and two small fish,” belonging to a boy, who was evidently willing to share.²⁹⁸

It has been suggested that the willingness of the boy to share his lunch brought about a general feeling of compassion among the people and that everyone who had brought something to eat gave it up so that it could be divided equally among all. That suggestion is shot down by the gathering in of the leftovers: twelve baskets full. Also, John’s conclusion that the crowd wanted to crown Jesus as their king, pleads against that theory.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁴ Matt. 9:36

²⁹⁵ Matt. 15:32

²⁹⁶ John 6:30,31

²⁹⁷ John 6:5,5

²⁹⁸ John 6:9

²⁹⁹ John 6:14,15

One of the interesting details in the story is the organization of the meal. The people were ordered to sit down in groups of fifty. Luke is the only one who gives us that number. The other Gospel writers merely state that Jesus told the disciples to have the people sit down. If we put the total of the crowd on 10,000, that would mean that there were 200 groups. Each of the disciples would then have to serve 16 or 17 of those groups.

Jesus took the five loaves and two fish in His hands and offered a prayer of thanks to the Father. At that moment, all there was were five loaves and two fish. We assume that Jesus divided that amount of food among the twelve disciples and that the multiplication took place as the disciples took about one fourth of a loaf and one sixth of a fish and began to give that out to their groups. As in the case of the widow in Elisha's story,³⁰⁰ where the oil kept flowing to there were containers left, so here to bread and fish kept multiplying till everyone had more than he or she could eat.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "In SS. Mark and Luke the tense of the verb rendered 'gave,' in the original Greek, is an imperfect, and signifies, 'he gave, and kept on giving.' This supplies a hint as to the way of working the miracle. Each disciple kept coming to him for a fresh supply of bread. It was, however, as it has been well said, a miracle of the highest order, one of creative power, and is to us inconceivable."

We are not told what happened with the leftovers. Twelve baskets meant one basket for each of the disciples. It may have been their meal for the next day. The gathering up of the leftovers also meant that, after the crowd left, the place would not look like a huge garbage dump.

X. Discipleship 9:18-27

Before going into the details of the following text, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: "At this point Luke omits the entire section Mark 6:45 – 8:26. Whatever his reason it yields an interesting sequence, as (one Bible scholar) points out. Herod had asked, 'Who is this' (9). Some answers are suggested by the feeding of the multitude (cf. John 6:14f.), three more are given by the people (19), and Peter adds one of his own (20). The climax comes with an awe-inspiring answer from God (35). We should notice also another sequence the disciples' recognition that Jesus is the Messiah is followed immediately by the teaching that this means a cross for him, and a cross, too, for them."

1. Peter's confession 9:18-20

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

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

20 *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God."*

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes here: "With this section of the Gospel, Luke brings the ministry of the Savior to a turning point. In the Galilean ministry, which ended with the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus had come to the peak of his popularity, and with his refusal to become a king (John 6:15), he began to lose public support. The confession of Peter and the revelation of the Transfiguration of the inner circle of disciples began the progress toward the cross, which dominates the latter part of this Gospel."

The Pulpit Commentary clarifies how much Luke has left out in moving from the feeding of the five thousand to the scene that is before us. We read: "Since the miracle of feeding the five thousand at Bethsaida Julias, Jesus had preached at Capernaum the famous sermon on the 'Bread of life' (reported in John 6.); he had wandered to the north-east as far as the maritime cities of Tyre and Sidon; had returned again to the Decapolis region for a brief sojourn; and then once more had turned his footsteps north; and it was in the extreme confines of the Holy Land, in the neighbourhood of Caesarea Philippi, and close to the great fountain, the source of the sacred Jordan, at the foot of the southern ridge of Hermon, where he put the momentous question here chronicled, to his listening disciples. Much had happened since the five thousand were fed. The defection which the Master had foreseen when he commenced his parable-teaching

³⁰⁰ 2 King 4:1-7

with the sad story of the ‘sower,’ had begun. After the great Capernaum sermon (John 6.), many had fallen away from him; the enthusiasm for his words was rapidly waning; the end was already in sight. ‘Well,’ he asks his own, ‘what are men saying about me? Whom do they think that I am?’”

The Greek text of v.18 states that Jesus was praying alone. That seems to contradict the addition that the disciples were with Him. What may be meant is that Jesus was alone with His disciples and that there was no crowd around, the place not being part of Israel proper. It can also indicate that Jesus’ intent to have a retreat with His disciples had finally been realized. It is obvious that the disciples were able to observe Jesus’ prayer from time to time and that He did not always withdraw to be alone with the Father as we read at other occasions.

We can hardly assume that Jesus was interested in the opinion of the public about Him, in order to have His behavior influenced by the poles. The burning question is best illustrated by John’s observation in the prologue of his Gospel: “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”³⁰¹ Israel could not be saved unless she recognized her Savior.

It was obvious from the answer the disciples gave to Jesus’ question that the general public did not recognize in Him the Messiah they proclaimed to be expecting.

Turning to the disciples, Jesus then asks who they think He is. The Greek text reads literally: “He said unto them, you say whom [that] I am?” According to Leon Morris, in *Luke*, “you” is emphatic in the Greek text. Luke gives us an abbreviated version of Peter’s answer. In *Matthew’s Gospel* we find the more complete: “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.’”³⁰²

The meaning of the word Christ is “anointed.” In the Old Testament anointing with oil was done to priests and kings. The oil was symbolic of the Holy Spirit. The first person we read about to be anointed was Aaron, the first high priest.³⁰³ Samuel anointed Saul to be the first king of Israel.³⁰⁴ After Saul’s rejection, David was anointed by Samuel.³⁰⁵ Solomon was next.³⁰⁶ Absalom had been anointed, although we don’t read when and where.³⁰⁷ We also read that Joash was anointed.³⁰⁸ The only other king about whom we read that he was anointed was Jehu,³⁰⁹ but we may assume that the ritual was performed at most coronations.

As far as we know, Jesus was never literally anointed with oil. But at His baptism, the real anointing, of which the pouring of oil was the symbol, took place when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove.³¹⁰

We may assume that Peter spoke for all the disciples, maybe with the exception of Judas, when he made his confession. As we read in Matthew’s record of the event, it is only by divine revelation that we can recognize the Messiah in the Man Jesus Christ. That means that without the Holy Spirit in us, we will not recognize the Holy Spirit in others. Jesus said this clearly in John’s Gospel: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets:

³⁰¹ John 1:10,14

³⁰² Matt. 16:16-18

³⁰³ Ex. 29:7

³⁰⁴ I Sam. 10:1

³⁰⁵ I Sam. 16:13

³⁰⁶ I Kings 1:39

³⁰⁷ II Sam. 19:10

³⁰⁸ II Chron. 23:11

³⁰⁹ II Kings 9:6

³¹⁰ Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32

‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.”³¹¹ That is why Jesus warned the disciples not to make a public announcement about His identity.

2. A prophecy of the passion 9:21-22

21 *Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone.*

22 *And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”*

Immediately following that warning, Jesus introduced His disciples to the mystery of His upcoming suffering and death. Luke leaves out how Peter reacted to this announcement and how Jesus rebuked him for it.³¹² Evidently, none of the disciples remembered Daniel’s prophecy about the Messiah. Daniel prophesied: “Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing.”³¹³

Jesus told the disciples at least three times that He would be rejected by the Sanhedrin and the Jewish people,³¹⁴ but this information never penetrated their minds. So when it actually happened, they were completely taken by surprise and defeated. That is why they were also not prepared for His resurrection, which He had predicted at the same time.

3. Taking up the cross 9:23-27

23 *Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*

24 *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.*

25 *What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?*

26 *If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*

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

It is difficult for us, from our perspective, to imagine the impact Jesus’ words must have had upon His disciples. Crucifixion was reserved for the outcasts of society. *The Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states about death by crucifixion: “Crucifixion on a stake or cross was practiced by the Greeks, notably Alexander the Great, who hung 2,000 people on crosses when the city of Tyre was destroyed. During the period between Greek and Roman control of Palestine, the Jewish ruler Alexander Jannaeus crucified 800 Pharisees who opposed him at Bethome. But these executions were condemned as detestable and abnormal by decent-minded people of Jannaeus’s day as well as by the later Jewish historian, Josephus.

From the early days of the Roman Republic, death on the cross was used for rebellious slaves and bandits, although Roman citizens were rarely subjected to this method of execution. The practice continued well beyond the New Testament period as one of the supreme punishments for military and political crimes such as desertion, spying, revealing secrets, rebellion, and sedition. Following the conversion of the emperor Constantine to Christianity, the cross became a sacred symbol and its use by Romans as a means of torture and death was abolished.”

What Jesus is saying here to His disciples is that they must prepare themselves to be regarded as the scum of the nation. Jesus’ advice to all of us is that we must practice self-denial, cross bearing, and obedience in following His example. Peter would later write in his first epistle: “But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered

³¹¹ John 6:44,45

³¹² Matt. 16:22,23

³¹³ Dan. 9:25,26

³¹⁴ See Luke 17:25; 22:15.

for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.³¹⁵ The Apostle Paul brings out the point even more strongly in writing about his relationship to the church in Corinth, where some of the member considered themselves to be above the apostle: “We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.”³¹⁶

All this has nothing to do with our human worth as people made in the image of God. Jesus says clearly: “My Father will honor the one who serves me.”³¹⁷ The point is that we often seek honor from the wrong source. We want recognition from our fellowmen, which can lead us astray to the point that we miss the reason for which we were created. Jesus said to the people of His time: “How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”³¹⁸

Following Christ will not always lead to physical abuse and emotional suffering; Christ warns us that such may be the price to pay for following Him. Our response should be the prayer that God would give us the grace needed to face the moment when it comes.

The Greek text of v. 25 reads literally: “For what is advantaged a man [if] he gains the whole world, and lose himself or be cast away?” Matthew and Mark render the text: “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”³¹⁹

The Pulpit Commentary quotes two Bible scholar’s who illustrate well the point that Jesus is getting across here: We read: “Godet’s comment here is pithy and quaint: ‘Jesus supposes, in this twenty-fifth verse, the act of *saving one’s own life* accomplished with the most complete success... amounting to a gain of the whole world. But in this very moment, the master of this magnificent domain finds himself condemned to perish! What gain to draw in a lottery a gallery of pictures... and at the same time to become blind!’ ‘O flesh,’ writes Luther (quoted by Dr. Morrison), ‘how mighty art thou, that thou canst still throw darkness over those things, even to the minds of the holy!’”

One truth we can draw from these statement indirectly is that the human soul is worth more than all the earth. The matter of losing our soul by wanting to save it and saving it by allowing it to get lost, sounds like an incomprehensible paradox. In practical daily life that is not how things work. What Jesus is emphasizing is the danger of trying to do by ourselves what we are unable to do by ourselves. If we try to fix up our own life we miss the point of our existence. God has created us for a purpose and Scripture assures us, in the words of David: “The Lord will fulfill [his purpose] for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever — do not abandon the works of your hands.”³²⁰ It is a matter of leaving the control into God’s hand instead of trying to hang on to it.

It is important to note how our basic decisions will determine our testimony. Hanging on to the controls, means not trusting God with them. It means being ashamed to admit that we can’t do it, although we say that we believe He can. Jesus says if we are ashamed of Him here and now, He will be ashamed of us then; that is at the point where it really counts. Surrender of our lives into the hand of God involves a certain feeling of shame. When we confess our sins, we tell Him what we are ashamed of. He took our shame upon Himself when He died naked on the cross and the Roman soldiers threw dice over the pieces of clothing they had taken off Him. He did this so that we will never have to stand naked before God; we will be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. The next scene in Luke’s chapter illustrates how sparkling such white robes are!

³¹⁵ I Peter 2:20-24

³¹⁶ I Cor. 4:10-13

³¹⁷ John 12:26

³¹⁸ John 5:44

³¹⁹ Matt. 16:26; Mark 8:36

³²⁰ Ps. 138:8

The last verse in this section: “I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God,” has puzzled Bible scholars throughout the ages. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “The paragraph is rounded off with a mysterious saying. Some of those present *will not taste of death before they see the kingdom of God*. *Taste of death* surely means ‘die,’ but it is not clear what the coming of *the kingdom of God* means in this context. Some maintain that Jesus is referring to the parousia and he was mistaken. But this does not fit the language used. If some will not die *before* (or ‘until,’ as GNB *heōs an*) the event in question, the implication seems to be that they will die after it, which is impossible of the *parousia*. But in any case this line is too simple. [One Bible scholar] notes seven possible interpretations of the word transfiguration, the resurrection and ascension, Pentecost, the spread of Christianity, the internal development of the gospel, the destruction of Jerusalem and the second advent. He holds that the reference to *some standing here* means that some (*viz.* those present on that particular occasion) have special privilege as opposed to people in general. This rules out all of the seven except the transfiguration and the destruction of Jerusalem of which [that scholar] prefers the latter. He may be right, for that coming in judgment suits the words as well as any. But there are many ways in which the kingdom comes and there is much also to be said for the view that Jesus is referring to the critical time of the crucifixion, resurrection and the coming of the Spirit. The saying is complex, and without further information it is impossible to be sure of the precise meaning intended.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: “These words seemingly require the return of Christ within the lifetime of the apostles, but he did not come. The most logical explanation is that Jesus was speaking of the Transfiguration as a sample of the coming of the Kingdom, given to some of the disciples as a pledge of the future (cf. 2 Peter 1:11,16-19).”

The Pulpit Commentary gives: “Two favorite explanations which (1) in the Transfiguration mystery, (2) in the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the Jewish state, see the fulfillment of this great prediction, must be put aside as inadequate, as failing utterly to satisfy any idea of the kingdom of God. Concerning (1), it must be borne in mind that the words were addressed, not only to the disciples, but to a mixed multitude; the expression then, ‘there be *some* standing here,’ etc., would seem to point to more than *three* (Peter, James, anti John were alone present at the Transfiguration) who should, while living, see the kingdom of God. Concerning (2), those who were witnesses of the great catastrophe which resulted in the sack of Jerusalem and the ruin of the Jewish polity, can scarcely be said to have looked on the kingdom of God. It was rather a great and terrible judgment; in no way can it fairly be termed the kingdom, or even its herald; it was simply an awful event in the world’s story. But surely the Lord’s disciples, the holy women, the still larger outer circle of loving followers of Jesus, who were changed by what happened during the forty days which immediately succeeded the Resurrection morning — changed from simple, loving, fearful, doubting men and women, into the brave resistless preachers and teachers of the new faith — the five hundred who gazed on the risen Lord in the Galilaean mountain, — *these* may in good earnest be said to have seen, while in life, ‘the kingdom of God.’ These five hundred, or at all events many of them, after the Resurrection, not only looked on God, but grasped the meaning of the presence and work of God on earth. The secret of the strange resistless power of these men in a hostile world was that their eyes had gazed on some of the sublime glories, and their ears had heard some of the tremendous secrets of *the kingdom of God*.”

Y. The transfiguration 9:28-36

28 *About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.*

29 *As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.*

30 *Two men, Moses and Elijah,*

31 *appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.*

32 *Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.*

33 As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters — one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.)

34 While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”

36 When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

The way Luke connects the report of Jesus’ transfiguration to the conversation that precedes this suggests that Jesus may have meant that seeing the kingdom of God, referred to this event. We can at least say that the revelation of Christ’s glory is present in both.

Both John and Peter refer to this experience as crucial in their own relationship with Christ. John does this, may be, in a more veiled manner than Peter, saying: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”³²¹ Peter makes a more specific reference to the event: “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”³²²

This transfiguration was unusual, not only in the sense that it happened only once in Jesus’ life as a mortal human being, but also that it does not fit the pattern of human existence in general. In every respect, Jesus lived on earth like a human being within the boundaries and limitations that govern all human life. His relationship with the Father set Him apart from the rest of mankind and made Him the “man after God’s own heart.” That title was used for David in the Old Testament,³²³ as a shadow of the One who would wear it perfectly.

It seems that the glory that was revealed in and through the body of Jesus Christ at this moment did not belong to earth. It was a feature of heaven never seen below. The first thing to be noted is that the transfiguration happened as Jesus was praying. The physical phenomenon that became visible to the disciples, who were present, was an expression of a spiritual reality. We may assume that Jesus experienced the glory in His spirit every time He communed with the Father, but it did not change His outward appearance. Matthew describes it as: “His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.”³²⁴ And Mark states: “There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”³²⁵ For a moment Jesus looked as John saw Him after His resurrection in heavenly glory.³²⁶

The appearance of Moses and Elijah made the event into, what we may call: “a war council.” On this planet, which is still under the dominion of “the prince of this world,” there was a gathering of a heavenly committee about “his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem”; that is the way Jesus would leave this earth by means of His death on the cross and His resurrection. The discussion was about divine strategy. The Greek word used for “departure” is *exodon*, which establishes a clear connection with the original Passover celebration, when the people of Israel prepared for leaving Egypt, by killing a lamb and applying the blood on the doorpost of their houses. This transfiguration identifies Jesus as the original and ultimate Passover Lamb.

It is clear that Jesus knew what awaited Him. We read in the previous verses of this chapter that Jesus told His disciples: “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and

³²¹ John 1:14

³²² II Peter 1:16-18

³²³ I Sam. 13:14

³²⁴ Matt. 17:2

³²⁵ Mark 9:2,3

³²⁶ Rev. 1:13-16

teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”³²⁷ We are not told what the details of the conversation were.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “A yet higher degree of transfiguration through communion with God is recorded in the case of Moses, whose face, after he had been with his God-Friend on the mount, shone with so bright a glory that mortal eye could not bear to gaze on it until the radiance began to fade away. A similar change is recorded to have taken place in the case of Stephen when he pleaded his Divine Master’s cause in the Sanhedrin hall at Jerusalem with such rapt eloquence that to the by-standers his face then, we read, ‘was as the face of an angel.’ Stephen told his audience later on, in the course of that earnest and impassioned pleading, that to him the very heavens were opened, and that his eyes were positively gazing on the beatific vision. Yet a step higher still was this transfiguration of our Lord. St. Luke tells us simply that, ‘as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered.’ St. Matthew tells us *how* it was altered when he writes that ‘his countenance shone as the sun.’ *And his raiment was white and glistening*; literally, *lightening forth*, as if from some inward source of glorious light. The earthly robes were so beautified by contact with this Divine light that human language is exhausted by the evangelists to find terms and metaphors to picture them. St. Matthew compares these garments of the Blessed One to light; St. Mark, to the snow; St. Luke, to the flashing lightning.

Ver. 30. — *And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias*; literally, *there were talking*. Evidently these two glorified beings had been conversing with Jesus some time before the three apostles, heavy with sleep, had noticed their presence; wearied and tired, slumber had overtaken them; we are not told how long they slept. The glorious light which environed them and the murmur of voices probably roused them, and in after-days they recounted what, after they were awake, they saw, and something of what they heard.”

We are not told how long the conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah lasted. The disciples were asleep and they must not have heard most of what was discussed. Jesus probably told them some of what took place afterwards. When the disciples awoke, the meeting had virtually come to its end.

We don’t know either whether the three disciples could identify Moses and Elijah, or whether Jesus told them afterwards who they were. What those two Old Testament prophets had in common was the way they had left this earth. We read about Elijah that he was bodily taken up to heaven in a whirlwind in a chariot of fire and horses of fire.³²⁸ About Moses, we read: “And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is.”³²⁹ The Bible tells us nothing further about the mystery that envelops those two men.

We don’t read either how “the prince of this world” reacted to this clandestine gathering in his territory. He must have understood that this meant an invasion into his terrain that would eventually lead to the end of his dominion. The allied invasion in Normandy, that spelled the end of Nazi rule and would bring about the end of World War II, was a vague shadow of what took place here.

The three disciples who woke up at the end of this divine committee meeting understood nothing of what went on. Peter blurted out something that made little sense. The idea was probably that he wanted to keep the two heavenly beings on earth. For the disciples it meant an experience of glory, such as they had never had before. Their quite human reaction was that they did not want to let it go away. Meeting such glory is worth to die for.

Like Peter, none of us know what we are saying when we trying to comment on the event described in these verses.

Peter is interrupted by another voice that speaks from a cloud that enveloped the disciples and Jesus. The text states that Moses and Elijah were leaving at this point. The disciples and Jesus were enveloped in a cloud, as Moses was when he entered into the presence of God on Mount Sinai and received the Ten Commandments.³³⁰ For the disciples this was a scary experience. It made them experience the presence of

³²⁷ Luke 9:22

³²⁸ II Kings 2:11

³²⁹ Deut. 34:5,6

³³⁰ Ex. 24:18

God, the Father, as they never had before. The same voice that had been heard at the moment of Jesus' baptism, spoke, saying: "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."³³¹ As the cloud lifted, the disciples found themselves alone with Jesus. The whole experience overwhelmed them to the point that they found themselves unable to talk about it for a long time.

Z. Jesus and the disciples 9:37-50

1. The demon-possessed boy 9:37-43^a

37 *The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him.*

38 *A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child.*

39 *A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him.*

40 *I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not."*

41 *"O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here."*

42 *Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father.*

43 *And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.*

It is difficult to imagine a greater contrast, both for Jesus as for the disciples, than the experience on top of the mountain and the condition in the valley below. The former had been "a mountain top experience" in the most literal sense of the word. The glory of the Lord had been so great and overwhelming that Satan had backed off and kept his distance. In the valley he demonstrated his presence and power in way that had made the disciples, who had remained behind, powerless.

A father had come with his demon-possessed child, asking the disciples to exorcise the demon, and they had found themselves unable to do so. Jesus had earlier given them authority over evils spirits as they had been sent out for the evangelistic journey,³³² but they were powerless before the devil that possessed this poor boy.

Both Matthew and Mark report the same incident.³³³ Mark states that the disciples were arguing about the case as Jesus approached them and Jesus asked them what their argument was about. Evidently, the disciples were puzzled about the fact that the authority Jesus had given them earlier, which they had used successfully on previous occasions, did not seem to be effective in this case. According to Mark, the father of the boy, seeing the disciples' helplessness, said to Jesus: "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." To which Jesus replied: "If you can'? Everything is possible for him who believes." And the father replied by saying: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

More amazing is Jesus' obvious and uncharacteristic anger toward His disciples because of their unbelief. It sounds as if our Lord is exasperated. He calls His own disciples and "unbelieving and perverse generation," and exclaims: "how long shall I stay with you and put up with you?" The Greek text uses the words *apistos*, which is a word used to describe a heathen and *diastrepho*, which means "corrupt." The Apostle Paul uses *apistos* for a heathen judge.³³⁴ We find in the verse: "... that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and *depraved* generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe."³³⁵

We would almost conclude that Jesus overreacted to the disciples' inability to do something that was beyond their strength, because of the glorious transfiguration He had just experienced Himself. We rarely

³³¹ Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22

³³² Luke 9:1

³³³ Matt. 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29

³³⁴ I Cor. 6:6

³³⁵ Phil. 2:15

realize how God looks upon the unbelief of those who have seen Him at work on other occasions. I find the thought that I may be judged for my unbelief a scary one.

Jesus was obviously angry at His disciples, because they had not used the spiritual armor, the one the Apostle Paul would later describe in Ephesians.³³⁶

Maybe the most important words in this story are the father's: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

The Pulpit Commentary takes Jesus' reproach to be directed, not primarily to the disciples, but to all the people who were present. We read: "This grave and mournful expression of the loving but just Master was addressed to the entire crowd, in whose midst he now found himself. *The people*, swayed hither and thither, now enthusiastic in his favor, when some sweet promise, or noble sentiment, or marvelous work touched their hearts, now coldly indifferent or even hostile, when his teaching seemed to exact some painful sacrifice of self at their hands. — These were looking on with quiet indifference at his disciples' failure in the case of the poor possessed child, and listened to their scribes as they wrangled with the Lord's dismayed and perplexed followers. These followers, trying to imitate their Master in his wonder-works, but failing because, after all, their faith in him wavered. The father of the child, confessing his unbelief, but utterly wretched at the sight of the suffering of his boy. The ghastly spectacle of the insane boy writhing and foaming on the ground, and then lying all bruised and disheveled, with the pallor of death on the poor, pain-wrung face, and this sorely afflicted one *a child*, one of those little ones whom Jesus loved so well. Poor child-sufferer, on whose comparatively innocent life the sin of mother and father weighed so heavily! What a contrast for the Lord between the heavenly hours he had just been spending on the mount, and this sad sight of pain and suffering, of jealousy and wrangling, of doubts and indecision, in the midst of which he now stood! 'Faithless and perverse,' cried the pitiful Lord with a burst of intense sorrow, 'how long shall I be with you, and suffer you?' One word, he knew, and for him all *this* might be exchanged for the scenes of heaven, for the company of angels and of blessed spirits, for the old home of grandeur and of peace; only it was just to heal this bitter curse that he had left his heaven-home. But the contrast between the glory of the Transfiguration mount and the memories which they evoked, and the present scene of pain and woe unutterable, of human passions and weakness, called forth from the Lord this bitter, sorrowful expression."

I find some difficulty in accepting the above interpretation. It seems more logical to take Jesus' reproach to be directed to His disciples, to whom He had given the power to cast out demons, but whose lack of faith and fear of the enemy prevented them from using their authority.

When the boy was brought to Jesus, the demon continued to torture the boy, but Jesus rebuked him and he left the boy. The Greek verb used is *epitimaō*, which is the same word used when Jesus rebuked the storm in the verse: "Then he got up and *rebuked* the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm."³³⁷

Mark gives us some details that are lacking in the two other Synoptics. First, we read that Jesus asked the father the question: "How long has he been like this?" This suggests that Jesus was not omniscient as He lived on earth. Without going too deeply into the question about the divine attributes of the Second Person of the Trinity, it is obvious that, living as a human being among us, Jesus had put the exercise of His divinity aside. If Jesus had lived on earth as the Son of God, instead of the Son of Man, He would have been omnipresent, as well as omniscient. It is not hard to prove that He was not omnipresent during His life on earth. It was after His resurrection that He could claim: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."³³⁸

Mark also describes the reaction of the demon when the boy was taken to Jesus. We read: "When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth." This sounds like an act of demonic defiance. We assume that the demon that had entered the boy was one that ranked rather high in the hierarchy of the realm of darkness.

³³⁶ Eph. 6:11-17

³³⁷ Matt. 8:26

³³⁸ Matt. 28:18

When it is all over, the disciples come with the question about their failure. But Luke passes over that part of the story.

There must have been something in the way Jesus preceded in this exorcism, that may the people realize that it was not Jesus' own power that defeated the enemy. We read that "they were all amazed at the greatness of God." Jesus' emphasis on faith bore fruit.

2. Another prophecy of the passion 9:43^b-45

43 *While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples,*

44 *"Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men."*

45 *But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.*

The NIV's rendering "Listen carefully..." reads literally in the Greek text: "Let sink down into your ears." The Greek verb used is *tithemi*, which has a variety of meanings, all referring to something that is horizontal as opposed to vertical. We find the same verb in the verse: "The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'"³³⁹

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: "The disciples are set in contrast to the general public who did no more than wonder at the miracle. After this solemn introduction Jesus tells his followers that he will *be delivered into the hands of men*. This is not very specific, which may be part of the reason why they did not understand this saying. But more importantly, *it was concealed from them*, which may mean that there was opposition from the forces of evil ... Luke goes out of his way to emphasize their inability to grasp the saying, for his words are much stronger than those in the other gospels."

Yet, this was not the first time Jesus spoke to His disciples about His upcoming suffering. Luke mentioned the same warning earlier in this chapter.³⁴⁰ Part of the problem was that the disciples did not understand the Old Testament prophecies about the suffering Messiah. After His resurrection, Jesus said to the two who were on their way to Emmaus: "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"³⁴¹ If we are honest, we must admit that even for us, who have the whole picture, it is difficult to grasp how great was the price paid for our redemption. In Charles Wesley's words, "Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me."

What was new in Jesus' warning to the disciples this time is that He told them that He would be betrayed. It was not until the very end that the disciples came to know that the betrayer would be one of their own group of twelve.

The most amazing part of the disciples' reaction was their fear which kept them from asking what Jesus meant. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: "The 'saying' was to them so utterly distasteful, perhaps inconceivable. It is possible that they thought this betrayal and death simply veiled for them some bit of teaching to be explained hereafter; it is possible they at once dismissed it from their minds, as men often do painful and mournful forebodings. At all events, they dreaded asking him any questions about this dark future of suffering which he said lay before him." We read in John's Gospel that, on the eve of the crucifixion, when Jesus brought up the topic again, the disciples did ask.³⁴² At that point Jesus warns them that their reaction to His crucifixion and death would be like the labor pains of a woman, giving birth to a child.

3. The disciples' pride 9:46-48

46 *An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.*

³³⁹ Matt. 22:44

³⁴⁰ See Luke 9:22.

³⁴¹ Luke 24:25,26

³⁴² John 16:17-22

47 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him.

48 Then he said to them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all — he is the greatest.”

Luke reports that the argument as to who was the greatest among them, did not come up once, but at least twice. The second time was on the eve of the crucifixion.³⁴³ Jesus answered their question, when it came up that second time, by going around and washing the disciples’ feet.³⁴⁴ The very fact that the argument arose proves that the demon that had been cast out of the boy, had not left the area but remained to whisper thoughts of arrogance into the disciples’ ears.

Jesus answered their attitude by placing a little child in their midst as an example of what their attitude ought to be. This does not mean that Jesus was saying that children are, general speaking, humble. The average child may be subject to fear and peer pressure, but that does not mean that a child is humble by nature. But when children boast, they usually boast about their daddies. “My father is stronger than your father!” A child’s boasting is in his relationship. No one is so conscious of being dependant upon his or her parents than a child. When a parent is lacking in a child’s life, it often causes severe emotional reactions. As adults, we ought to boast about our heavenly Father, as a child would its earthly father. One of Paul’s favorite expressions, which he repeats several times in his epistles, is: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”³⁴⁵

Jesus places the little child in the middle, not only as an example, but also to teach the disciples a lesson in recognition the worth of human beings in general. There are some people we admire and consider great because of their achievements; Jesus wants us to recognize the image of God in all of our fellowmen. He comes to us incognito, disguised as a little child, as a poor sufferer, or a reject of society. In a parable, in Matthew’s Gospel, we read that the king says: “‘I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”³⁴⁶

We must throughout our whole life consider ourselves to be little children, totally dependant upon the love and care of our heavenly Father. Then we will be able to love our neighbor as our self and treat him with the honor that is due to every human being. We are only great, if we consider others greater than ourselves.

4. The strange exorcist 9:49-50

49 “Master,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.”

50 “Do not stop him,” Jesus said, “for whoever is not against you is for you.”

The NIV simply states: “said John.” The Greek verb used is *apokrinomai*, which literally means to respond.” It is considered to be a Hebraism for “to begin to speak.” Some used the Name of Jesus to exorcise demons and, evidently, with some measure of success. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus mentions people who would do this, but yet face judgment at the end of time. We read: “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”³⁴⁷ But that is not the answer Jesus gives to John at this time.

³⁴³ Luke 22:24

³⁴⁴ John 13:1-17

³⁴⁵ I Cor 1:31; II Cor. 10:17

³⁴⁶ Matt. 25:35-40

³⁴⁷ Matt. 7:22,23

It is important to remember the context in which this conversation took place. Luke reports in the same chapter that the disciples had tried to cast out a demon from a young boy, but they had failed. Following this, they had argued about who was the greatest among them. And now, someone shows up who is not one of the inner circle and who casts out demons successfully.

This was not a case like the sons of Sceva, about whom we read in Acts, that they would say, “In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” To which the evil spirit responded: “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?”³⁴⁸ This man must have believed in Jesus as the Messiah and his using of Jesus’ Name proved that the devil recognized him as a true disciple, although he had not been chosen to be one of the twelve. The disciples’ concern was not so much the struggle against the kingdom of darkness as their exclusiveness as Jesus’ disciples. They had been concerned about who was the greatest among them; let it not be that someone outside their circle would be greater than they!

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “The older authorities, manuscripts, and the more venerable versions here read for the last clause, ‘He that is not against you is for you.’ Exegetically as well as critically this amended reading is to be preferred. The offence of the stranger, if it were an offence, was not against Jesus, whose Name had evidently been used reverently and with faith, but against the disciples, whose rights and privileges were presumably infringed upon. The Master’s reply contained a broad and far-reaching truth. No earthly society, however holy, would be able exclusively to claim the Divine powers inseparably connected with a true and faithful use of his Name. This is the grand and massive answer which stretches over a history of eighteen centuries, and which will possibly extend over many yet to come; the answer which gives an ample reason why noble Christian work is done whether emanating from Churches bearing the name of Protestant, or Roman, or Greek.”

5. From Galilee to Jerusalem 9:51-19:44

AA. More lessons in discipleship 9:51-62

1. Rejection by the Samaritans 9:51-56

51 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him;

53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.

54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”

55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them,

56 and they went to another village.

The Greek text of v.51 reads literally: “And it came to pass when the time was come that he should be received up, that he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.” The Greek verb for “received up” is *analempsis*, “ascension.” This is the only place in Scripture where this word is found. The Greek word rendered “resolutely,” is *sterizo*, which conveys the idea of “strengthen,” “to turn resolutely in a certain direction.” Jesus used the word in His warning to Peter about his denial of Christ, saying: “I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, *strengthen* your brothers.”

The thought conveyed is that it took a definite act of the will for Jesus to engage upon His last trip to Jerusalem, knowing that He would die there and give “His life as a ransom for many.”³⁴⁹

In his introduction to this section, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “There is no real parallel in this section to any of the other Gospels, though some parts of it are like passages in Matthew and, after 18:15, in Mark also ... Luke speaks specifically of Jesus as travelling to Jerusalem, but his ministry is far from over and there is much that he has yet to teach his disciples ... There can be no doubt about the idea of a journey ... But a problem arises when we try to trace its course. From 9:51ff. Jesus appears to be going by the shorter

³⁴⁸ See Acts 19:13-16.

³⁴⁹ Matt. 20:28

route through Samaria, but later we find him passing through Jericho (19:1) which lay on the longer route through Perea. In 10:38 he is at the village of Martha and Mary, i.e. Bethany (John 11:1), only a couple of miles from Jerusalem. But in 17:11 he is between Samaria and Galilee.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: “This section of Luke’s Gospel, which is largely peculiar to him, contains many episodes and parables which are not found elsewhere, and which may have been the results of his personal research. The chronology is difficult; the section seems to be a collection of stories rather than a complete narrative. It does, however, represent the teaching of Jesus in the last year of his ministry, and reflects a period of rejection and tension.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on the way Luke describes Jesus’ decision to go to Jerusalem: “It divides the work of Christ in the flesh into two great stages; all that preceded this belonging to the one, and all that follows it to the other. During the one, He formally ‘came to His own,’ and ‘would have gathered them;’ during the other, the awful consequences of ‘His own receiving Him not,’ rapidly revealed themselves.”

The journey of Jesus and the disciples to Jerusalem was in obedience to the Old Testament command that every Israelite must appear three times a year before the Lord at the place of His revelation.³⁵⁰ We gather from Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar, that the Samaritans considered their mountain to place where God was to be encountered.³⁵¹ For that reason they did not treat any pilgrims going to Jerusalem with kindness. According to Leon Morris, in *Luke*: “Josephus tells us that Samaritans were not adverse to ill-treating pilgrims going up to Jerusalem, even to the extent of murdering them on occasion.”

James and John were deeply offended by the treatment the Samaritans were giving their master and their suggestion that those people ought to be taught a lesson was meant to be an act of homage to Jesus. They may have thought of Elijah’s treatment of the soldiers of King Ahaziah, who were sent to arrest the prophet and perished when fire from heaven fell on them.³⁵² Mark mentions that Jesus gave His two disciples the nickname Boanerges, meaning “Sons of Thunder.”³⁵³ Whether they had this name before this incident or after, we do not know.

2. Whole-heartedness 9:57-62

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

58 *Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”*

59 *He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”*

60 *Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”*

61 *Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family.”*

62 *Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

Matthew reports the same incident, but he places it at an earlier point in Jesus’ ministry. He also identified the first person as a teacher of the law and the second one as “another disciple.”³⁵⁴ Of the two people in this story, the first took the initiative to come to Jesus without being called; the second was approached by Jesus with a call to follow. We do not read what the first person’s reaction was to Jesus’ curt answer that seemed to be a rejection. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “The rejection at Samaria gave point to this utterance. The Lord of the earth had less that he could call his own than the beasts and the birds.” But if the incident took place earlier in Jesus’ ministry, the rejection at Samaria could not have

³⁵⁰ Ex. 34:23

³⁵¹ John 4:20

³⁵² II Kings 1:9-12

³⁵³ Mark 3:17

³⁵⁴ Matt 8:19-22

played a role in Jesus' answer to the man. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: "The first man expresses his readiness to follow Jesus. There is nothing wrong with the way he put it: he is ready to go anywhere Jesus leads. But the reply shows that he has not reckoned with what this means. Animals and birds have their places of habitation *but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head*. This is an incidental glimpse of the cost of the incarnation. And it shows that the follower of Jesus must not reckon on luxurious living."

In commenting on the identical text in Matthew, we wrote: We could ask ourselves how it is possible that a human being, such as the Lord, who is worth more than foxes and birds that do have holes and nests, ends up with less. If the Son of Man, the pretender to the throne of the universe, does not have a place to lay His head, then there is obviously something wrong with our world. That is exactly the point the Lord wants to make here. This is part of His humiliation, "because He suffered death," that He "as made a little lower than the angels,"³⁵⁵ than other human beings, than the foxes and the birds. It demonstrates both the tragedy of His humanity and the triumph of it. He lived right out of the Father's hand!

Later in his Gospel, Luke will mention Jesus' parable about counting the cost of following Jesus.³⁵⁶ Jesus' answer to this volunteer may indicate that He understood that the man was impulsive and would not have the endurance to persevere in a life of fulltime service. We all must follow Jesus by surrendering ourselves to God's plan for our lives, but that does not mean that we must all enter into fulltime Christian service. It takes a specific personal call to fulfill specific tasks in serving the Lord. That does not mean that we must not pray Isaiah's prayer: "Here am I. Send me!"³⁵⁷ But unless we hear God say "go," we must remain where we are.

The second person received Jesus' personal call, but he declined. Actually, he did not decline, but postponed. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes about the man's reply, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father": "Some hold that, had the father been a corpse at home, the man would probably not have been with Jesus at all; he would have been occupied with the duties connected with the funeral. On this view his request was to stay at home until his father died. This might have meant an indefinite delay and the affairs of the kingdom cannot be put off. But the words have an even greater urgency of the father was dead. The Jews counted proper burial as most important; to leave the father unburied 'was something scandalous to a Jew' ... The duty of burial took precedence over the study of the law, the temple service, the killing of the Passover sacrifice, the observance of circumcision and the reading of the Megillah." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* adds: "The speaker did not mean that his father had died, but that he was obligated to care for him until he died."

Jesus' answer: "Let the dead bury their own dead," obviously cannot be taken literally. The Word of God had come to this man. It had brought him into a spiritual relationship with his Creator. That set him apart from all others who were still living in spiritual darkness. It was the death Paul would later write about to the church of Ephesus, saying: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved."³⁵⁸

There is a third person in Luke's account who volunteers to follow Jesus. His request to be allowed to say good bye to his family seems reasonable to us. In *Matthew's Gospel*, we read that Jesus said: "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."³⁵⁹ Luke uses even stronger language at another place in his Gospel, where Jesus said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple."³⁶⁰

³⁵⁵ See Heb. 2:8,9.

³⁵⁶ Luke 14:28-33

³⁵⁷ Isa. 6:8

³⁵⁸ Eph. 2:1-5

³⁵⁹ Matt. 10:37

³⁶⁰ Luke 14:26

In His answer to this man, Jesus uses the image of a farmer plowing his field. In order to make his furrows straight, one must look ahead, not back. The picture may have been inspired by the Old Testament story of Elijah's call of Elisha. Elisha made a similar request to say good bye to his family. We get the impression that he never did. His decision to follow Elijah was carried out in the most radical manner possible. We read: "So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. 'Let me kiss my father and mother good-by,' he said, 'and then I will come with you.' 'Go back,' Elijah replied. 'What have I done to you?' So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant."³⁶¹

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "There is an implied reproach in our Lord's reply to what, on first thoughts, would seem a reasonable request. The offer in this case came from the man himself. It would appear that this would-be disciple, on thinking the matter over, considered it might be desirable to hear what his family and friends thought about his project. At all events, one thing is clear his first ardor was cooled, his first love left. The Master, in his pithy but striking comment, shows when such is the case, that there is little or no hope of any real noble work being carried out."

The Apostle Paul may have thought of this Gospel incident when he got into an argument with Barnabas about taking John Mark with them. Barnabas wanted Mark, but Paul refused, "because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work."³⁶² Mark had put his hands on the plow and looked back.

BB. The mission of the seventy 10:1-24

1. The mission and the message 10:1-12

1 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.

2 He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

4 Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

5 "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.'

6 If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you.

7 Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

8 "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you.

9 Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'

10 But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say,

11 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.'

12 I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

In his general introduction to this whole section, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: "Luke alone tells of the sending out of this large band of disciples. Some of the instructions are similar to those in Matthew's account of the sending out of the Twelve, which leads some scholars to the view that this passage is simply a variant of Matthew's charge to the Twelve. This, however, will not bear criticism. Luke's recording of

³⁶¹ I Kings 19:19-21

³⁶² Acts 15:37-39

this mission in such close proximity to that of the Twelve (9:1-6) shows that he regarded them as distinct. Each is intelligible in its own place. And, as (one scholar) points out, it is probable that Jesus utilized the service of others than the Twelve and equally probably that this would later be largely forgotten in view of the place given to the Twelve in Christian recollection.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “‘After these things’ formally began the solemn marches in the direction of Jerusalem, which ended, as we have stated, in the last Passover. Roughly speaking, the seventy were first sent out about the October of the last year of the public ministry. The manuscripts vary between seventy and seventy two. The preponderance of authority is in favor of seventy. The Sanhedrin numbered seventy-one. The elders appointed by Moses were seventy. There was a Jewish saying also that the number of peoples on earth were seventy or seventy-two. Fourteen descended from Japheth, thirty from Ham, twenty-six from Shem. In the ‘Clementine Recognitions,’ a writing of the first half of the third century, the number of peoples is given as seventy-two. The Fathers dwell on the sacred symbolism of the desert-wanderings especially mentioned at Elim — ‘twelve wells and seventy palm trees,’ alluding to the two groups of Christ-sent missionaries, the twelve apostles and the ‘seventy’ here mentioned.”

There are several features in this section that are found in other contexts in Matthew. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about this: “Jesus began his instruction with words he apparently used on more than one occasion in slightly different forms (cf. Matt. 9:37f.; John 4:35). That *the harvest is plentiful* means that there is much work to do; that *the laborers are few* that they must not delay. It means also that they must look to *the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest*, as well as for their own strength and guidance. Prayer for more workers for God is a duty resting on those who labor for him. They go to no easy task. *Lambs in the midst of wolves* are in no enviable situation. The simile point both to danger and to helplessness. God’s servants are always in some sense at the mercy of the world, and in their own strength they cannot cope with the situation in which they find themselves. They must look to God. So Jesus tells them to take no equipment (cf. 9:3). The *purse* (*ballantion*, used by Luke only in the New Testament) is a money-bag. The *bag* (*pēra*) is a traveler’s bag ... That they are to carry *no sandals* probably means, not that they are to go barefoot, but that they are not to take a spare pair. They are to go as they are. *Salute no one on the road* is not an exhortation to impoliteness; it is a reminder that their business is urgent and that they are not to delay it by dallying with wayside acquaintances. Eastern salutations can be elaborate and time-consuming.”

The image of the lambs in the midst of wolves, probably, refers more to the presence of demonic powers, trying to destroy those who put their faith in God, than to opposition from humans.

The words “do not greet anyone on the road” may be a reference to Elisha’s instructions to his servant Gehazi, when the Shunammite woman, whose son had died, came to the prophet and he said to Gehazi: “Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy’s face.”³⁶³

The reference to Sodom, with which this section ends, fits better in the warning issued to Korazin and Bethsaida. “That day” is the day of final judgment. The fact that the inhabitants of Sodom will stand before the Judge of all the earth on the last day of world history, makes us understand that their punishment on the day the city was destroyed, was not the final punishment, but a foreshadowing of the judgment to come. It is difficult for us to understand this, since it seems that what happened on the day Sodom’s world came to an end, was the final day of their history. We must not conclude from this, however, that there is an opportunity for repentance after physical death on earth.

2. The doom of the Galilean cities 10:13-16

13 *“Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.*

14 *But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you.*

15 *And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths.*

³⁶³ II Kings 4:29

16 “He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes about the cities mentioned here: “The mention of the towns *Chorazin* (in the New Testament only here and in the Matthean parallel) and *Bethsaida* brings home the fact that we know little of Jesus’ life. Nothing at all is known of his ministry in the former town and very little of that in the latter. But these words show that he had worked extensively in both places and done miracles there. Indeed the *mighty works* he did had been of such a character that they would have produced repentance in *Tyre and Sidon*. Those cities, situated on the coast to the north of Galilee, had formed the heart of the Phoenician empire. They were great commercial centers, but had sinned grievously and had been the object of God’s appeal through the prophets and of his judgment when they would not respond (cf. Isa. 23; Ezek. 26 – 28). Yet these cities would be better off *in the judgment* than Chorazin and Bethsaida. So serious is it to reject the Son of God.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes about these words of judgment regarding the cities mentioned: “A great theological truth is urged in this saying of the Master. Men will be judged not only for what they have done or failed to do, but their opportunities, their circumstances, their chances in life, will be, before they are judged, strictly taken into account.”

Jesus had made Capernaum His home for a certain time.³⁶⁴ The people of Capernaum must have seen many of Jesus’ miracles. Their reaction had been praise to God and they had said: “We have never seen anything like this!”³⁶⁵ But it had not brought them to repentance. Capernaum had been lifted up to the skies, as it had been for a while the place of Jesus’ residence. Matthew saw in Jesus’ move to Capernaum the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy and he commented on Jesus’ residence in that place: “Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ‘Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.’”³⁶⁶ Capernaum had been one of the places where: “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”³⁶⁷

As Jesus sent out the seventy evangelists, He told them: “He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” Those who preach the Word of God have the awesome responsibility and privilege of representing God the Father and God the Son.

3. The return of the seventy 10:17-20

17 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”

18 He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

As the team returned, they reported back to Jesus how successful they had been, particularly in casting out demons of people who had been possessed. The fact that the “land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali” had been called “Galilee of the Gentiles,” and that Matthew commented on the spiritual darkness of the area, may indicate that most of the people who made out this team had had personal experiences of demonic oppression. They had not only been set free personally, but they had become instrumental in the deliverance of others.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on Jesus’ reaction: “It is not easy to see the meaning of the words, *I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven*. *Heaven* will stand here for the height of power ... Probably in the mission of the seventy Jesus saw the defeat of Satan (his verb means ‘I was watching,’ imperfect tense),

³⁶⁴ Mark 2:1

³⁶⁵ Mark 2:12

³⁶⁶ Matt. 4:13-16

³⁶⁷ John 1:5

a defeat as sudden and unexpected (to the forces of evil) as a flash of lightning. To the casual observer all that had happened was that a few mendicant preachers had spoken in a few small towns and healed a few sick folk. But in that gospel triumph Satan had suffered a notable defeat. Another view takes the words to refer to Satan's fall which Jesus saw in pre-incarnation times. On this view the disciples are being warned not be proud as a result of their successful mission: they should remember that even Satan fell. But the former view is to be preferred."

It does not seem logical to interpret Jesus' words as meaning that He witnessed the original fall of Lucifer in which the archangel turned from a holy creature into the prince of darkness. There are several instances in which Jesus mentions the defeat of Satan. As He made the public announcement about His upcoming death, He said: "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out."³⁶⁸ And in connection with the coming of the Holy Spirit, He told His disciples: "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned."³⁶⁹ Our text is better understood to mean that the exorcism of the seventy had brought about a spiritual cleansing of the area in which they had worked.

Barnes' Notes explains: "'Satan' here denotes evidently the prince of the devils who had been cast out by the seventy disciples, for the discourse was respecting their power over evil spirits. 'Lightning' is an image of 'rapidity' or 'quickness.' I saw Satan fall 'quickly' or rapidly-as quick as lightning. The phrase 'from heaven' is to be referred to the lightning, and does not mean that he saw 'Satan' fall 'from heaven,' but that he fell as quick as lightning from heaven or from the clouds. The whole expression then may mean, 'I saw at your command devils immediately depart, as quick as the flash of lightning. I gave you this power-I saw it put forth-and I give also now, in addition to this, the power to tread on serpents,' etc."

Satan and his minions are here described as snakes and scorpions. The Psalmist uses the image of a lion and cobra, stating: "You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent."³⁷⁰

The first representative of the human race had fallen to the temptation of the serpent. The last Adam, as the Apostle Paul calls our Lord, not only resisted the same kind of temptation, but defeated the enemy, even during His human life on earth. That defeat became final as He died on the cross. In the words of the Apostle Paul: "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."³⁷¹ The power Jesus had given to the seventy was, in a way, a down payment on His final victory over the enemy by His death on the cross. That which was the future foundation for them is the historic basis for our victory over Satan's power. We have authority over the prince of darkness, because when Satan struck Jesus' heel, He crushed the serpent's head, according to the promise given to Adam and Eve.³⁷²

There is, however, a very subtle danger in the spiritual authority that is given to the believer in Jesus Christ. If our power over the enemy gives us a feeling of pride, we have fallen victim to the enemy's propaganda. Our salvation, the fact that God "has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,"³⁷³ ought to be the main reason of our rejoicing. It is also the safest.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "Many commentators here cautiously point out that even this legitimate joy should be tempered with fear and trembling, for even this true title to honor might be blotted out of that golden book of heaven (see ... Exodus 32:33; ... Jeremiah 17:13; ... Psalm 69:28; ... Revelation 22:19). In *this* deep legitimate joy men and women of all callings, who try to follow the Master, in every age, may share."

³⁶⁸ John 12:31

³⁶⁹ John 16:8-11

³⁷⁰ Ps. 91:13

³⁷¹ Col. 2:15

³⁷² Gen. 3:15

³⁷³ Col. 1:13

4. Jesus' joy 10:21-24

21 *At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.*

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

23 *Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see.*

24 *For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."*

Matthew puts Jesus' exclamation of joy at the point where His ministry is misunderstood and appears to have failed.³⁷⁴ The Greek word used to express Jesus' joy as He prayed a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father is *agalliao*, which could be rendered "to jump for joy."

The description of the team of seventy as being not "wise and learned," but "little children," does not sound very complementary to us. The Apostle Paul, who was the most educated of the apostles, expresses the same truth in his epistle to the Corinthians, saying: "Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."³⁷⁵ God delights in defeating His enemy by using weakness instead of superior strength.

V.22, which we also find in Matthew's Gospel,³⁷⁶ is unique in that it combines features of the divinity of Jesus Christ with His humanity. Before His death on the cross, Jesus was not in a position where omnipotence was available to Him. It was after His resurrection that He could declare: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."³⁷⁷ The Father committed "all things" to the Son in His humanity. As the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus possessed all the divine attributes that the Father possessed. In His humanity, these had all been laid aside when He "made himself nothing."³⁷⁸ Although, as God Jesus knew the Father as no human being ever could, the words "No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" are spoken by "the Man, Jesus Christ."³⁷⁹

I do not agree with the commentary of *The Pulpit Commentary* on this point, which reads: "These words, spoken late in the public ministry, evidently refer to the Almighty power possessed and frequently exercised by the incarnate Son of God. During the days of his humiliation, Jesus Christ exercised the power of Creator, Lord of the elements, Lord of the secrets of health and disease, Lord of life and death." I believe that the power that is evinced in Jesus' human life was not His own divine power, but the power of the Father, released in Him by faith. Divine attributes cannot be separated from each other. God cannot be omnipotent and not be omnipresent at the same time. If we say that Jesus was omnipotent during His human life on earth, we must also believe that He was omnipresent, which, obviously, He was not.

If Jesus could have used His own divine omnipotence as a human being, His life cannot be an example for us to follow. And, according to the Apostle Peter, "Christ suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example, that [we] should follow in his steps."³⁸⁰ Speaking as a human being, Jesus said: "I am the way and the truth

³⁷⁴ Matt. 11:25-27

³⁷⁵ I Cor. 1:26-29

³⁷⁶ Matt. 11:27

³⁷⁷ Matt. 28:18

³⁷⁸ Phil. 2:7

³⁷⁹ I Tim. 2:5

³⁸⁰ I Peter 2:21

and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well.”³⁸¹

Commenting on vv.23 and 24, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “After his prayer Jesus had a word for the disciples. He spoke to them *privately*, which implies that the previous words were uttered in the hearing of more than the disciples. But these words are for them alone. Jesus says that they are really blessed in seeing what they see. *Many prophets and kings* desired to see and hear what they saw and heard, but without doing so. Jesus was the long-expected Messiah, the One whom the spiritually minded had expected and longed for through the centuries. But it was given to the disciples to see the fulfillment of all this and it was not given to any previous generation.”

CC. The good Samaritan 10:25-37

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

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

28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.

35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

There are other instances in the Gospels in which the summing up of the Old Testament Law as “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,” and “love your neighbor as yourself” is mentioned.³⁸² The two parts are not found together in the Pentateuch. The first commandment to love God is found in Deuteronomy,³⁸³ the second is part of a commandment in Leviticus, which reads in full: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”³⁸⁴ In Luke’s Gospel, it is the lawyer who quotes the Scripture, in the other Gospels it is Jesus.

We read that the lawyer asked the question, not because he sought the truth, but he wanted to test Jesus. The Greek verb used is *ekpeirazo*, which means “to test thoroughly.” We find the same word in Jesus’

³⁸¹ John 14:6,7

³⁸² Matt. 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31

³⁸³ Deut. 6:5

³⁸⁴ Lev. 19:18

answer to Satan, during His temptation, when the devil suggested that Jesus throw Himself down from the roof of the temple: “It is also written: ‘Do not *put* the Lord your God *to the test*.’”³⁸⁵

The sad irony of the scene is in the fact that the lawyer asked a question about the salvation of his soul, without really wanting to be saved. He just wanted to find out what this Rabbi thought about the matter. Jesus’ answer is not the one we ought to give to people who are really searching for the truth. It is not by keeping the law, even the law to love God and neighbor, that one can be saved. In the words of the Apostle Paul: “No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”³⁸⁶

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes about the lawyer’s second question: “His basic attitude was still wrong; he had not understood the implication of his own words. So he went on to ask, *And who is my neighbor?* He saw that it meant more than the man next door. But how much more? There were different ideas among the Jews on this point, but they all seem to be confined to the nation Israel; the idea of love towards mankind had not reached them. As we approach the parable we must bear in mind that it is told to the lawyer in answer to the question, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ Not, ‘What must I do to be saved?’”

The lawyer’s second question was asked in an effort to “justify himself.” He was a doctor in theology, speaking to an itinerant Rabbi. The purpose of his first question had been to see how much Jesus knew, and maybe, to make Him look ignorant. Jesus’ answer put the ball in his court. Now *he* was being put to the test. In order to avoid the embarrassing situation in which he would be tested and fail, he asked the second question about who this neighbor was. The double clause of the law quoted was the love of God and of the neighbor. The lawyer could not very well ask “and who is God?” He was supposed to know that. He was also supposed to know who his neighbor was. The question was asked to “justify himself.” The Greek verb used is *dikaioo*, “to be righteous.” In some contexts it can be rendered “to be proved right,” as in the verse: “But wisdom is *proved right* by her actions.”³⁸⁷

The Pulpit Commentary states: “For reply the Master told him and the listening bystanders the parable-story we know so well as the ‘good Samaritan’ — the parable, which has been ‘the consolation of the wanderer and the sufferer, of the outcast and the heretic, in every age and country.’ ... The story was one of those parables especially loved by Luke (and Paul), in which instruction is conveyed, not by types, but by example. It was very probably a simple recital of a fact which had happened, and at some period in the Lord’s life had come under his own observation. The local scenery, the characters of the story, would all lead to the supposition that the parable was spoken in or near Jerusalem.”

This parable is unique to Luke’s Gospel. The point of the story is to highlight the cost of loving one’s neighbor. The parable does not so much answer the lawyer’s question as to who his neighbor was, as to identify himself as someone’s neighbor. That seems to be the most unique twist in the story. The parable may have been based upon an incident that had actually occurred.

The scene is the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. According to *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, “This was the most public road in all Judea, as it was the grand thoroughfare between these two cities for the courses of priests, twelve thousand of whom are said to have resided at Jericho.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The way he was travelling was the road leading down from Jerusalem to Jericho, a distance of twenty-one miles — not the only way, but the most direct. It was a rugged, rocky pass, well adapted for the purposes of thieves and desperadoes, and was known, owing to the many dark deeds of which it had been the scene, as ‘The Way of Blood.’ The Lord’s words tell the story. The traveler, likely enough a Jew peddler, had fallen among thieves, who had robbed him, and then had left their victim — dying or dead, what cared they? lying in the pass.”

The victim of the robbery was left “half dead.” The first traveler to pass by was a priest, probably on his way home after having served his temple duties. *Barnes’ Notes* notes: “It is said that not less than 12,000 priests and Levites dwelt at Jericho; and as their business was at Jerusalem, of course there would be many of them constantly traveling on that road.”

³⁸⁵ Matt. 4:7

³⁸⁶ Rom. 3:20

³⁸⁷ Matt. 11:19

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about this part of the story: “Since the man was ‘half dead’ the priest would probably not have been able to be certain whether he was dead or not without touching him. But if he touched him and the man was in fact dead, then he would have incurred the ceremonial defilement that the Law forbade (Lev. 21:1ff). He could be sure of retaining his ceremonial purity only by leaving the man alone. He could be sure he was not omitting to help a man in need only by going to him. In this conflict it was ceremonial purity that won the day. Not only did he not help, he went to the other side of the road. He deliberately avoided any possibility of contact. Other factors may have weighed with him, such as the possibility that the robbers might return, the nature of his business, and so on. We do not know. We do know that the priest left the man where he was in his suffering and need.”

The irony, as expressed in the priest’s dilemma, was that the topic under discussion was love of one’s neighbor. The priest could have become ritually impure, which would prevent him from carrying out his priestly duties for a limited time. But he was not going to Jerusalem to serve in the temple; he was going home! If for any person the job becomes more important than the people, we are in serious trouble. The victim, being half dead, would probably have groaned or given some other indication of suffering. By passing “on the other side” of the road, by deliberately crossing the street, the priest indicated that he did not want to get involved. It was the task of a priest to stand between God and man. The first duty of this priest was to demonstrate to love of God to a dying victim of an ambush.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “It has been remarked that the grave censure which this story levels at the everyday want of charity on the part of priests and Levites, fills up what would otherwise have been a blank in the Master’s many-sided teaching. Nowhere else in the gospel narrative do we find our Lord taking up the attitude of censor of the priestly and Levitical orders. We have little difficulty in discovering reasons for this apparently strange reticence. They were still the official guardians and ministers of his Father’s house. In his public teaching, as a rule, he would refrain from touching these or their hollow, pretentious lives. Once, and once only, in this one parable did he dwell — but even here with no severe denunciations, as in the case of scribes and Pharisees — on the shortcomings of the priestly caste. The bitter woe was fast coming on these degenerate children of Aaron. In less than half a century, that house, the glory and the joy of Israel, would be utterly destroyed, not to be raised again. No woe that the Christ could pronounce could be as crushing in its pitiless condemnation. *The very reason for the existence of priest and Levite as priest and Levite would exist no longer.* The selfish life of the doomed order, in which holiness seemed effectually to have been divorced from charity, is portrayed in the lifelike picture of the parable of the good Samaritan.”

Jesus could not have chosen a better third character to contrast the gross neglect of those in Israel who were supposed to represent the love of God. Samaritans were despised by the Jews and the feeling was mutual. The victim of the robbery would have expected help from a priest and a Levite. But when the Samaritan came along, he must have felt that all hope of help was gone.

The irony (this is the second time we use this word in this context) is that the person whose religious concepts were incomplete and imperfect, understood more about the law of the love of God and of one’s neighbor than those who had the law. The lawyer who wanted to justify himself, knew less about God’s law than the Samaritan who worshipped that which he didn’t know.³⁸⁸ Jesus’ parable illustrates clearly what the Apostle John would later write in his epistle: “We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”³⁸⁹

The first-aid the Samaritan gives to the victim was meant to clean and bandage the wounds, which must have been many and all over the man’s body. For this he used a mixture of oil and wine. The wine was an antiseptic and the oil soothed the pain. The victim, not being able to walk, was put on the back of the Samaritan’s donkey and the owner walked beside him. He took him to an inn, which was probably in Jericho and spent the night there with him, paying for the room for both of them. Leaving the next day, he gave the innkeeper two denarii, which was approximately the value of two days’ wages, and left to

³⁸⁸ John 4:22

³⁸⁹ I John 4:19-21

continue his own business. The innkeeper accepted the money and the Samaritan's promise that he would pay the rest upon his return.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The Master had been called by his bitter foes, in their blind rage, a 'Samaritan.' Has he in any way picturing himself?"

The same commentary explains about the "inn": "The Greek word is not the same as the 'inn' of ... Luke 2:7. It reminds us that, besides the open khan or caravanserai spoken of at Bethlehem, and which was crowded with travelers, in Palestine at this period was to be found the Greek type of inn, where a host or landlord entertained the guests. The khan was simply a group of empty buildings kept up for the use of travelers, who provided furniture and food for themselves. Throughout the Levant, Greek customs were gradually being introduced."

Jesus ends the story with the question: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The lawyer's question had been: "And who is my neighbor?" meaning, who is the person I am supposed to love? Jesus replies with the question: "Whose neighbor are you?" That turns the question upside-down. In introducing the Samaritan into the story, Jesus made the enemy, the one who was supposed to be hated, the example of neighborly love. The lawyer must have regretted that he ever asked the question. He had known the answer all the time.

One final observation by *The Pulpit Commentary*: "Another and a very different exposition of this great and loving parable treats it as a Divine allegory ... In the allegory, the wounded traveler represents mankind at large, stripped by the devil and his angels; he is left by them grievously wounded, yet not dead outright. Priest and Levite were alike powerless to help. 'Many passed us by,' once wrote a devout mediaeval writer, 'and there was none to save.' Moses and his Law, Aaron and his sacrifices, patriarch, prophet, and priest, — these were powerless. Only the true Samaritan (Christ), beholding, was moved with compassion and poured oil into the wounds."

DD. Martha and Mary 10:38-42

38 *As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.*

39 *She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.*

40 *But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'*

41 *'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things,*

42 *but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'*

Luke is the only one of the synoptic Gospel writers who tells us about Jesus' visit to the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. John devotes a lengthy chapter to Lazarus' resurrection,³⁹⁰ which was one of the most spectacular miracles Jesus performed.

It has been observed that Luke's chronology is less than consistent. We read earlier that Jesus set out on, what was to be His last journey to Jerusalem.³⁹¹ Bethany was only about two miles from Jerusalem. Yet, in a later chapter in this Gospel, we find Jesus far from Jerusalem.³⁹² Luke does not give us the name of the place where the incident described here occurred. We learn from John that Bethany was the name of the village where Martha, Mary and Lazarus lived. Luke also leaves Lazarus out of the picture; Martha and Mary are the only two important characters in this story.

The home is described as Martha's, which probably means that she was the oldest member of this family of three singles. The NIV states that Martha opened "her home" to Jesus. The Greek text reads literally: "a certain woman named Martha received Him," leaving "into her house" to be understood.

³⁹⁰ John 11

³⁹¹ Luke 9:51

³⁹² See Luke 17:11.

The Greek verb, rendered “receive,” is *hupodechomai* which can be rendered: “to admit under one’s roof, i.e. or “to entertain hospitably.” There was a touch of joy in this kind of reception. We find the same verb used in the situation in which Zacchaeus received Jesus into his home.³⁹³

In spite of her joy in receiving Jesus, Martha got sidetracked by the details. The Greek verb used is *perispao*, which literally means: “to drag all around.” We may assume that both Martha and Mary had been attracted to Jesus by what they had heard Him say and see Him do. They probably both believed Him to be the Messiah. Martha reacted to this revelation by wanting to do things for Jesus, Mary by wanting Jesus to do things for her. Jesus blessed both of them by His presence. For Mary this meant enjoyment of fellowship; for Martha losing her head. Mary realized that she could only be a blessing by being blessed. Martha wanted to bless Jesus, but she ended up “running on empty.”

Martha and Mary both knew they needed help. Mary expected this help to come from Jesus, Martha from Mary.

Martha’s tone is definitely accusatory: “Lord, don’t you care ...” We read that Martha came to Jesus. The Greek verb *ephistemi* is used in a way which suggests suddenness and even aggression. We find the same verb in the verse: “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day *will close on you unexpectedly* like a trap.”³⁹⁴ Martha blamed Jesus for her sister’s attitude.

Jesus’ double use of the name, “Martha, Martha” suggests a tender tone of voice. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “There are several notable instances of this repetition of the name by the Master in the New Testament story, and in each case apparently in pitying love. So ‘Simon, Simon,’ in ... Luke 22:31, and ‘Saul, Saul,’ in ... Acts 9:4.”

The two Greek verbs in Jesus’ answer, translated “worried and upset,” are *merimnao*, “to be anxious,” and *thorubazo*, “to bother,” or “to distract.” We find *merimnao* used in the verses: “Therefore I tell you, do not *worry* about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Who of you by *worrying* can add a single hour to his life?”³⁹⁵ This is the only place in the New Testament where the verb *thorubazo* is used.

Martha was not only distracted and worried about “many things,” but she missed the only thing of vital importance, which is the quietness of fellowship with God. Jesus would express this later to His disciples, saying: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”³⁹⁶ Fellowship with God ought to be the priority of our life. David wrote in one of his Psalms: “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.”³⁹⁷ The many things that distracted Martha kept her from that which was crucial.

What kept Martha busy to the point of distraction was her fear of losing things. We gather this from Jesus’ assurance that what Mary had found “will not be taken away from her.” Fellowship with God and obedience to His will is our guarantee of eternal life. “The man who does the will of God lives forever.”³⁹⁸

EE. Prayer

1. The Lord’s prayer 11:1-4

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

³⁹³ Luke 19:5,6

³⁹⁴ Luke 21:34

³⁹⁵ Matt. 6:25-27

³⁹⁶ John 15:5

³⁹⁷ Ps. 27:4

³⁹⁸ I John 2:17

2 He said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

3 Give us each day our daily bread.

4 Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.””

In vv. 2-4, Luke gives us a shorter version of the prayer we find in *Matthew’s Gospel* in the context of *The Sermon on the Mount*.³⁹⁹ There, the audience was a large crowd; here, the twelve disciples seem to have been the only ones present. And the prayer is given here in answer to one of the disciple’s question.

Much has been written about the question whether Matthew and Luke are on the same page here, or whether Jesus taught this prayer, which has come to be known as “The Lord’s Prayer,” on more than one occasion. The latter seems to be the case. Some Bible scholars believe that most of the twelve disciples were not present when Jesus preached *The Sermon on the Mount*.

The Pulpit Commentary suggests the following: “It seems as though some of his disciples — we know at this period many were with him besides the twelve — heard their Master praying. It appeared to them — no doubt, as they caught here and there a word and expression as he prayed, perhaps partly alone, partly to himself — as though a friend was speaking to a friend; *they* would pray like that: would not the Master teach them his beautiful secret? In reply, Jesus repeats to them, in rather an abbreviated form, what, at an earlier period of his ministry, he had taught to the multitudes and the twelve. It was very likely one of the seventy who made this request, who had not been present on the first occasion, when the Lord gave his prayer of prayers to the people. We have already remarked that at this time the twelve, who *had* heard it, were probably often absent on mission work. It was a usual practice among the more famous rabbis to give prayer-formulas to their pupils.”

The fact that one of the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray was probably more inspired by Jesus’ attitude in prayer than by the words He used. The disciples realized that the way Jesus prayed was different from the way they did. There was in Jesus’ prayers evidence of fellowship with the Father that went beyond any personal experience they knew. The difference was in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul writes: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”⁴⁰⁰ It is obvious that Jesus could not teach His disciples that which only the Holy Spirit could do in and through them. They would have to be filled with the Spirit in order to enjoy the relationship He had with the Father. And, as v.13 states, the ministry of the Holy Spirit would be available to them upon request.

We conclude, therefore, that Jesus did not mean to give the disciples a certain formula to use, but a set of principles that ought to govern their communion with God. The three principles expressed in this module pertain to our recognition of God, His glory, His power and His will, and to our physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes that, “While it can be prayed privately, it is essentially a corporate prayer. All the pronouns are plural.”

The first thing to be observed is that Jesus wants us to address the Almighty as “Father.” The Jews in Jesus’ day considered it to be offensive that Jesus used the term “Father” for God, saying that in doing so He was making himself equal with God.⁴⁰¹ Yet, according to Leon Morris, in *Luke*, “In prayer the Jews used the form *abinu*, ‘Our Father’ (found, for example, in the fourth and sixth of the ‘Eighteen Benedictions’), normally adding ‘in heaven, or the like. This tended to put people at a distance from the great God, whereas Jesus taught his followers to think of God as their Father (that they learnt the lesson is seen in Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).”

The appellation “Father” goes beyond the recognition of God as Creator. When we approach God in prayer we do so as people who are created in His image and likeness. The emphasis is on the spiritual relationship with have with Him. God was never addressed as “Father” in the Old Testament. When God is

³⁹⁹ Matt. 6:9-13

⁴⁰⁰ Rom. 8:26

⁴⁰¹ John 5:18

called “Father” in the Psalms, it is by way of comparison. Earthly fatherhood is taken as the model to which God is compared. For example, David sings: “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”⁴⁰² And: “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.”⁴⁰³ Jesus introduces God in the New Testament as “the Father.” To the Samaritan woman He said: “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”⁴⁰⁴ Thus, He indicated that God is *The* Father, and earthly fatherhood is modeled upon the heavenly reality. God is not like an earthly father, He is the original!

The Name stands for God’s character, which is for the total of His divine attributes. When we pray for God’s Name to be hallowed, that is “made holy,” we do not ask for something to happen in God, but in us. We ask to be enlightened in our understanding of who God is. Many people who pray have no idea who they are talking to. The experience of being in God’s presence will make us, like the Apostle John, fall “at his feet as though dead.”⁴⁰⁵ “Hallowed be your name” could be rendered: “Help us to understand who You really are!” God is awesome and we must be filled with awe when we approach Him.

“Your kingdom come” is again a request for recognition of a reality. As Creator of the universe of which our planet is a part, God has the right to rule absolutely. “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.”⁴⁰⁶ Satan’s claim to be “the prince of this world” is illegal.

Here again, it can be said that the prayer for God’s kingdom to come is a prayer for the realization of an existing condition. There is a sense in which God’s rule is over all of creation, but Jesus said elsewhere: “the kingdom of God is within you.”⁴⁰⁷ We need the help of the Holy Spirit to surrender our lives to the total control of God’s will. In Matthew’s version the text reads: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The kingdom of God is the place where God is king. If God is the king of our life, the kingdom of God is, in fact, within us.

There will, however, be a time in world history and in the history of the universe when, in the words of the angel: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”⁴⁰⁸

The Greek text of v.3 reads literally: “Give us our daily bread day by day.” Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states: “The precise meaning of *epiousios*, daily, is not clear. It is a very rare word and most discussions centre on possible derivations, since there is practically no usage to appeal to ... The most favored meanings are *daily* (RSV), ‘for tomorrow’ (Moffatt), and ‘the food we need’ (*GNB*, i.e. ‘the bread for existence,’; cf. Prov. 30:8). The first mentioned fits the term and harmonizes best with the tenor of the prayer.” The Greek word Luke uses is *epiousa*, literally meaning “following,” or “next,” which is only found in this verse in Scripture. Matthew uses the word *epiousios*.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “Generally speaking, the patristic expositors interpret this famous word in such a way that the petition prays, not for the *common bread* of everyday life, but for a spiritual food, even the Bread from heaven, which giveth life unto the world.” Referring to one particular interpretation by a certain Bible scholar, who endorsed the spiritual intent of the words, the commentary continues: “So taken, the petition..., raises us to the region of thought in which we leave all that concerns our earthly life in the hands of our Father, without asking him even for the supply of its simplest wants, seeking only that he would sustain and perfect the higher life of our spirit.’ If, however, the interpretation (on the whole unlikely) of *common, everyday bread*, be accepted, and the simple reference of ... Luke 10:42 to the necessity for only one dish at table be adopted, then, with the charge to the seventy contained in ... Luke 10:7, to eat and drink “such things as they give,” and the further instruction to “take no

⁴⁰² Ps. 68:5

⁴⁰³ Ps. 103:13

⁴⁰⁴ John 4:21-23

⁴⁰⁵ Rev. 1:17

⁴⁰⁶ Ps. 24:1

⁴⁰⁷ Luke 17:21

⁴⁰⁸ Rev. 11:15

thought... what ye shall eat” (... Luke 12:22), we have, in this last period of our Lord’s public life, clear expressions on the part of the Master of his wish that his followers should ever content themselves with the simplest human food, avoiding not only all excess, but all extravagance, and even consideration and thought, in providing for anything beyond the simplest daily sustenance.”

Other renderings of the verse are: “Give us each day the food we need.”⁴⁰⁹ And: “Give us our food day by day.”⁴¹⁰

The Greek text of v.4 reads literally: “And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us.” The Lord, obviously, did not believe that everyone always forgives without holding any grudges. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the servant who received forgiveness for a large debt and refused to give it to someone who owed him a small amount.⁴¹¹

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “The prayer, *forgive us our sins*, is followed by the assertion that we forgive those who sin against us (*every one who is indebted to us* refers not to financial transactions but to sin, here seen as a debt). This does not make a human action, the forgiveness of others, the ground of forgiveness. The New Testament is clear that forgiveness springs from the grace of God and not from any human merit. Rather the thought moves from the lesser to the greater: since even sinful people like us forgive, we can confidently appeal to a merciful God. (cf. [one certain Bible scholar] ‘an unforgiving heart is not in a condition that can accept forgiveness’).”

The idea is not only that, if forgiveness is something that is even practiced by sinful human beings, how much more would a holy God be willing to forgive. Conspicuously absent from this statement is the concept of atonement. Forgives comes with a price. It was God who paid the ultimate price in forgiving our sins because of the death of His Son. Unwillingness to forgive those who injured us proves that we lack understanding of our own indebtedness to God. What others owe us can never come close to what we owe God.

In the phrase “And lead us not into temptation” the two important Greek words are *eisphero*, literally “to carry inward,” and *peirasmos*, “putting to proof,” or “experience evil.” The first word is found in the story of the men who carried a paralytic on a mat and tried to *take him into* the house to lay him before Jesus.⁴¹² *Peirasmos* can refer to any kind of test, whether sinful or not. Jesus used the word when He said to His disciples: “You are those *who have stood by me* in my trials.”⁴¹³ In Matthew’s version the words “but deliver us from the evil one” are added.⁴¹⁴

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “The word *peirasmos* is the normal word for ‘temptation’ (though it can mean ‘test’) and temptation is sure correct here. This does not imply that God does sometimes cause us to be tempted, and in fact James assures us that he never does (Jas. 1:13). Rather Jesus is encouraging an attitude, the attitude that flees from temptation (cf. I Cor. 6:18; 10:14; I Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22). Christians recognize their weakness and the ease with which they give way to the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil. So they pray to be delivered from them all.”

2. The friend at midnight 11:5-8

5 *Then he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread,*

6 *because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’*

7 *“Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’*

8 *I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.*

⁴⁰⁹ The New Living Translation

⁴¹⁰ *The Living Bible*

⁴¹¹ Matt. 18:23-35

⁴¹² Luke 5:18

⁴¹³ Luke 22:28

⁴¹⁴ Matt. 6:13

We must remember that this whole conversation began when the disciples asked Jesus about prayer because they had observed Him when He prayed Himself. Persistence in prayer, therefore, must have been something Jesus practiced Himself. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “This whole passage follows naturally the Lord’s own formula of prayer. The teaching contained in vers. 1-13 may be well summarized as the Master’s *lesson on prayer*. The disciples, when they heard Jesus pray, asked him to instruct them in the holy art. The Lord then suggested to them a series of short *subjects* for constant prayer, and further gave them *words* in which they could embody these subjects, and then proceeded to press upon them that this constant seeking help from God should never be interrupted; no discouragements were ever to prevent their praying.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “Jesus follows with a humorous parable which drives home the point that prayer must be persistent and that God is always ready to give. The setting is a small village where there are no shops. A household would bake its bread each morning. Jesus pictures a man whose household has used its supply and on whom a journeying friend makes an unexpected call. It is at *midnight*, which probably means that the friend had traveled after dark to escape the heat. The man must feed his friend, for hospitality is a sacred duty. So he goes to another friend for *three loaves*, i.e. three small loaves which would suffice for one man. But this second householder has shut his door and gone to bed with his children. Evidently he was a poor man living in a one-roomed house. The whole family would sleep on a raised platform at one end of such a room, possibly with animals at floor level. A man in such a situation could not get up without disturbing the whole family. He raises no difficulty about giving the bread, but the bother of getting up is quite another matter. It is much easier to stay where he is.

But the man is persistent. He will not go away, nor will he let his friend go back to sleep. And where friendship cannot prevail, *his importunity* (lit. ‘shamelessness’) wins the day. The lesson is clear. We must not play at prayer, but must show persistence if we do not receive the answer immediately. It is not that God is unwilling and must be pressed into answering. The whole context makes it clear that he is eager to give. But if we do not want what we are asking for enough to be persistent, we do not want it very much. It is not such tepid prayer that is answered.”

A good illustration for the need of persistence in prayer is found in the story of Daniel. Daniel had spent three weeks in fasting and prayer, when God sent him a vision in which an angel told him: “Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.”⁴¹⁵

Jesus does not mention demonic opposition to the prayers of humans, but that is obviously one of the factors that make persistence in prayer a necessity.

The Greek word that catches the attention in this story is *anaideia*, literally “impudence,” or “impertinence.” It contains the word *aidos*, “shame” plus a negative “a” which makes it “shameless.” The shamelessness of the friend consisted in the fact that he came at that late hour of the night when he could expect his friend to be asleep. If inopportunity wins the day in the parable, how much more will our prayers be heard by a God who never sleeps or slumbers! As David wrote in one of his Psalms: “He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”⁴¹⁶

3. Asking and giving 11:9-13

9 *“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*

10 *For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

11 *“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?*

12 *Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?*

⁴¹⁵ Dan. 10:12-14

⁴¹⁶ Ps. 121:3,4

13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Luke's text is basically the same as Matthew's. Matthew places Jesus' words in the context of *The Sermon on the Mount* and instead of defining God's gift as "the Holy Spirit," as Luke does, he writes "good gifts."⁴¹⁷ Matthew does not mention the scorpion, but used "snake" instead; and he concludes Jesus' remarks with "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets," which Luke omits.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "This statement, that those who pray to God shall surely be heard, rests absolutely on Christ's authority. It is not given as a fact which is self-evident, but as a fact which he, the Speaker, knows to be true. The man in bed is pictured in the parable as utterly selfish, regardless of his poorer neighbor's wants and sufferings. So God *seems* to us often, as we pray to him day after day, month after month, and our prayer receives no answer; he merely appears to us then as a passionless Spectator of the tragedies and comedies of time. 'Children,' said the Savior, 'the selfish man of my story yields to constant importunity. Think ye God, who only *seems* to be deaf to man's pleading voice that he may deepen his faith and educate his soul — think ye God is not listening all the while, and will not in the end, in all his glorious generosity, grant the prayer? Only pray on.'"

In the lesson drawn from the previous parable, Jesus goes from a friend-to-friend relationship, to the bond between father and son. Jesus wants us to realize that our prayers to God express an affiliation that goes well beyond the bonds of friendship only. We could say here that "blood is thicker than water." Our relationship with God is actually greater and more real than a parent-child one. God is *the* Father, the original One. Physical fatherhood reflects this spiritual reality.

Also, our earthly relationships are all marred by the presence of sin. In our relationship with God, we find that "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."⁴¹⁸ Our sinful nature that plays an important role in the most intimate of human relations is of no importance in connection with receiving answers to prayer.

And even in the imperfect father-son relationship it would be inconceivable that a father would give a snake or a scorpion to his child that asks for food. Our human tendency is to ascribe to God features of cruelty that would be the worst in human relationships.

FF. Jesus and the evil spirits 11:14-26

1. The Beelzebul controversy 11:14-23

14 Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed.

15 But some of them said, "By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons."

16 Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven.

17 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall.

18 If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub.

19 Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges.

20 But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

21 "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe.

22 But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.

⁴¹⁷ Matt. 7:7-12

⁴¹⁸ I John 1:5

23 “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.”

In this section we are introduced to Beelzebul, or Beelzebub. *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* states that he was “Believed to be the prince of evil spirits (Matt 10:25; 12:24,27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15-28). By some Beelzebul is thought to mean ba’al zebel, the ‘dung god,’ an expression intended to designate with loathing the prince of all moral impurity. It is supposed, at the same time, that the name Beelzebub, the Philistine god of flies, was changed to Beelzebul (‘god of dung’) and employed in an opprobrious way as a name of the devil. Others prefer to derive the word from ba’al zebul, the ‘lord of the dwelling’ in which evil spirits dwell. The fact that Jesus designates Himself as ‘master of the house’ would seem to indicate that Beelzebul had a similar meaning.”

The occasion was the healing of a mute person by exorcising the demon that caused the symptoms. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: “The incident is not placed in its precise chronological sequence; Luke simply tells us that Jesus was healing a demoniac, a man who was dumb (Matthew says he was blind as well). After the exorcism the dumb man spoke. The emphasis is on the controversy that followed, so Luke tells the story of the miracle very briefly and adds no more than that the people marveled.

But some of them attributed the miracle to Beelzebul, the prince of demons. Matthew adds the information that these people were Pharisees, and Mark that they were scribes from Jerusalem. The name of the demon prince is given in some MSS as ‘Beelzebul’ (apparently no more than an easier way of pronouncing the same name, and in the Vulgate as ‘Beelzebub.’ It seems fairly clear that the name was ‘Beelzebul,’ but why it was applied and what it means are difficult questions. The form ‘Baalzebub’ occurs as the name of the god of Ekron (2 Kgs. 1:2, 3, 6, 16; in the Hebrew text, not LXX). This means ‘lord of flies’ and may well be a Hebrew pun on a similar sounding Philistine name ... Some suggest that the Jews further corrupted this into the similar sounding ‘Baalzebul,’ ‘lord of dung,’ a way of referring to the heathen god, and then transferred this name to a demon. But the form ‘Baalzebul,’ also occurs in the Ras Shamra tablets as the name of a Canaanite deity, the term apparently meaning ‘lord of the dwelling’ or ‘lord of the high place.’ Our best understanding of the evidence seems to be that the Jews took this name of a heathen god and understood it in terms of the similar sounding Hebrew, ‘lord of dung.’ They applied it to a prominent demon, perhaps to Satan himself. Jesus clearly understood it to refer to Satan.”

Luke does not specify that the accusations against Jesus came particularly from the side of the Pharisees and the doctors of the law. He merely states: “some of them said ...” In *Matthew’s Gospel* we read that it was in connection with this accusation that Jesus mentions the danger of committing the ultimate sin, the one for which no forgiveness exists: blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹⁹ Evidently, this means that people knowingly and purposely call the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Satan. Blasphemy supposes that the person knows the truth and yet speaks against it. The accusation suggested that Jesus was a representative of Satan. In order to prove that He was not, the accusers asked Jesus to perform a miracle. That request makes no sense, since their accusation came in answer to a miracle Jesus had just performed.

Evidently, none of this was spoken out loud. We read that “Jesus knew their thoughts.” The accusers must have spoken under their breath, fearing that an outright accusation might evoke the wrath of the crowd who “was amazed.”

We know very little about the hierarchy of the kingdom of darkness. Evidently, Satan has a number of demons, fallen angels who are working under his authority to pervert mankind. It is doubtful that their unity of rank is governed by loyalty, which is a virtue, and virtues are probably non-existence in the realm of darkness. What binds demons together is their common enemy, God. Struggle against a common enemy generally generates unity. I remember during the Second World War, how in the Netherlands, people from different political parties set aside their foundational differences in order to oppose Nazi occupation. People from strict conservative persuasion would stand shoulder to shoulder with confirmed communists. What Jesus is saying is that Satan would not tolerate division in his ranks. It would mean the end of his power.

Referring to others who practiced exorcism, Jesus asked: “Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out?” The Greek text uses the word *huioi*, “sons.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “A question has been raised respecting these professed exorcists of evil spirits whom Jesus here styles ‘your sons.’ Who were they? Some, notably the older patristic expositors, have

⁴¹⁹ Matt. 12:31,32

supposed that our Lord here alluded to his own apostles, to whom a measure of this power over unclean spirits was certainly given. Others, that they are identical with the ‘pupils of the wise,’ disciples of the great rabbinical schools, such as were presided over by the famous doctors of the Talmud. This is quite possible; but we have no proof that professional exorcists were pupils in any of the known rabbinical schools. It is more likely that by this general term Jesus alluded to the exorcists. These were, at this period of Jewish history, numerous. They are alluded to in ... Acts 19:13; by Josephus ...; mention of them is also specially made in the Talmud, which even describes something of their mode of procedure. Our Lord seems to affirm in some cases, to a certain extent, the efficacy of the power of these exorcists. ‘These, Jews like yourselves,’ argued Jesus, ‘some of them, you know, belonging to your own Pharisee sect, — these have in certain cases apparently driven out the evil spirit of insanity: you do not accuse them, do you, of working with an evil angel?’”

Jesus uses the term “the finger of God” as an image of God’s power. The Egyptian magicians used this term, speaking to Pharaoh when Moses and Aaron took the dust of Egypt and threw it in the air, producing gnats.⁴²⁰ In Matthew’s account the words “the Spirit of God” are used.⁴²¹ The coming of the kingdom of God means the end of Satan’s power.

At present we cannot say that Satan has become totally powerless. He is still “the prince of this world.” The time when Satan is chained has not yet come.⁴²² But if a person surrenders to God personally, it means the defeat of demonic powers in the life of that individual. This can even occur collectively.

To end the argument, Jesus uses a picture of a robbery. The man of the house, to use a modern image, has a gun to protect himself against break-ins. This should give him enough protection, as long as the would-be thief does not come in with an automatic weapon.

We must remember that Jesus speaks here, not as the Second Person of the Trinity, but as the Son of Man. He fulfills that role that had been given originally to Adam, whom God had put in charge of His creation. Jesus fits the picture that David saw, as he wrote in one of his Psalms: “You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.”⁴²³ Satan may be “a strong man, fully armed,” but Jesus, as God’s envoi in this world, is the Stronger One. Jesus’ healing of the mute, demon-possessed man was proof of that superior power.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The exegesis is easy here. The *strong man* is the devil; *his palace* is the world; *his goods* especially here the poor possessed; *the stronger than he* is Jesus himself, who, as he paints this feature in the picture, is thinking of the scenes of the temptation, when in good earnest he overcame his ghostly adversary, then he took from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and now he, the Conqueror, *divideth his spoils*, among which are these unhappy possessed ones now being rescued from the power of their tormentor.”

Turning to His accusers, Jesus says: “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.” He asks them: “Whose side are you on?” They had suggested that Jesus was on Satan’s side. Here, Jesus turns the tables.

2. The return of the evil spirit 11:24-26

24 *“When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’*

25 *When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order.*

26 *Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.”*

⁴²⁰ Ex. 8:19

⁴²¹ Matt. 12:28

⁴²² Rev. 20:1,2

⁴²³ Ps. 8:5-8

These few words give us insight into the workings of the powers of evil. There must have been a great deal of demonic activity in Israel at the time of Jesus' stay on earth. Matthew reports that when Jesus moved to Capernaum, He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."⁴²⁴ Jesus' ministry in Galilee brought about an enormous spiritual cleanup. It helps to put Jesus' warning about the possible return of demons against this background. The evil spirit that had been evicted from the mute man could easily return, bringing others with him. Evidently, demons do not necessarily leave this earth when they are cast out.

We must also remember that Matthew put this whole event in the context of Jesus' warning against the sin of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Unless the Holy Spirit fills the heart of the person who has been delivered from satanic power, the house remains empty. It may be swept and clean, but it is empty.

Looking at what happened after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, we conclude that hordes of evils spirits return, not only to Galilee but to Jerusalem also. The persecution of the early church is proof of this.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: "No-one can live for long in a moral vacuum. The kingdom of God does not bring about such a vacuum but a victory over evil such that evil is replaced with good and with God."

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "There is another well-known historical reference contained in these words of Jesus, which speak of the triumphant return of the temporarily banished devil. In this, the chosen people represent the one possessed; the expelled devil was the one besetting sin which from the time of the Exodus to the Captivity — that fearsome idolatry with its attendant mischief — exercised over Israel a strange and horrible fascination. After the return from exile, idolatry seemed driven out for ever. But the house was only empty; there was no indwelling Presence there of the Holy Spirit of the Lord, only an outward show of ceremonies and of rites, only a religion of the lips, not of the heart; and so the old state of possession returned under the form of hypocrisy, envy, narrowness, jealousy, covetousness. The Jewish historian, Josephus, has dared to paint the picture of national degradation which closed in the sack and burning of the city and temple (A.D. 70). But this striking application belongs to St. Matthew, who represents our Lord closing his sad sketch of the return of the devils with the words, 'Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.' It may have been that Jesus prolonged on this occasion the terrible sermon, and drew out lesson upon lesson suggested by his words; but it is more likely that St. Matthew is writing of another occasion, when, taunted with working with the aid of the devil, the Master spoke similar words, drawing from them other lessons. The general lesson to be learned — if the above exegesis be in the main followed — is the utter hopelessness of attempting any work which has as its object the amelioration of the human race *without the aid of Christ*. Earnestness and imposture will alike in the end fail here. The case of the one of whom the disciples complained to their Master as casting out devils, but who followed not with them, was very different. *Here* the Lord said, 'Forbid him not: he that is not against us is for us.' The good work in this case was done, we read, *in the Name of Christ*: hence the Divine approval."

GG. Jesus teaches the people 11:27 – 12:59

1. True blessedness 11:27-28

27 *As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you."*

28 *He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on this section: "At this point Luke has a considerable section of teaching, including some interesting controversial passages. There is little indication of time or place though some of the passages are linked to another.

Typically, it is Luke alone who tells us of this spontaneous exclamation from a woman in the crowd. She apparently thought it must be wonderful to have a son like Jesus and she pronounced a blessing on the mother who had borne him. Her words involve a recognition of his Messiahship and are in part a salutation of Jesus. He did not reject the woman, but proceeded to something more significant. The word *menoun*,

⁴²⁴ Matt. 4:15,16

translated *rather*, ‘does not question the truth of the preceding statement, but emphasizes the greater relevance of what follows ...’ It is not physical relationship to Jesus that is supremely important, but hearing and keeping the word of God. This point to patient, unspectacular religious practice. *The word of God* came to the people of that day through the teaching of Jesus as well as through the study of Scripture. They had a certain advantage over others, but Jesus is saying that wherever people have Scripture the path to blessing is open.”

Actually, the Greek word *menoun* can have a positive meaning, depending on the context. The Apostle Paul uses it positively in the following two verses: “But I ask: Did they not hear? *Of course* they did.”⁴²⁵ And: “*What is more*, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.”⁴²⁶

The words “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” can, first of all be applied to Mary, Jesus’ mother. At the annunciation of Jesus’ birth, she had answered the angel: “I am the Lord’s servant, May it be to me as you have said.”⁴²⁷ And there is a sense in which Christ must be born in each of us. This is what Paul wrote to the Galatians, about whom he was burdened: “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”⁴²⁸ This is what happens to those who hear the Word of God and obey it.

Quoting Chrysostom, *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “How many women have blessed the holy Virgin, and desired to be such a mother as she was! What hinders them? Christ has made for us a wide way to this happiness, and not only women, but men may tread it — the way of obedience; this it is which makes such a mother, and not the throes of parturition.’ It has been ingeniously noticed that this is the first direct fulfillment of the ‘Magnificat’ — ‘all generations shall call me blessed.’”

2. The sign of Jonah 11:29-32

29 *As the crowds increased, Jesus said, “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.*

30 *For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation.*

31 *The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.*

32 *The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.*

In answer to the popular request to perform a miracle, Jesus gives a double answer which highlights two subjects who were not Israelites and one, Jonah, who represented the nation of Israel and her task to the outside world.

As we noted before, the request for a miracle was rather strange, since the whole discussion started with the miracle of Jesus’ healing of the mute man. The crowd’s request was not for another healing but for something that would feed their lust for sensation. They did not want to be blessed; they wanted to be entertained. That is what made them into “a wicked and adulterous generation.” The word “adulterous” refers to infidelity in their relationship with God. In this case it was not idolatry, but lack of intimacy with God.

Using Jonah’s experience as a figure of His own death and resurrection, Jesus reveals some interesting details about Jonah’s ministry and the reaction of the Ninevites to his preaching. The fact that Jonah became “a sign” to the Ninevites, must mean that, in his preaching, Jonah mentioned the experience of fleeing from Joppa, of being thrown into the sea and being swallowed up by the fish. We learn that detail from Matthew’s quotation of Jesus’ words: “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three

⁴²⁵ Rom. 10:18

⁴²⁶ Phil. 3:8

⁴²⁷ Luke 1:38

⁴²⁸ Gal. 4:19

nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”⁴²⁹ It must have been the miraculous survival of Jonah that had impressed the Ninevites to the point where they repented of their sins.

As Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: “In the event at Nineveh the prophet and his preaching led to repentance, but neither Jesus’ resurrection (16:51) nor his preaching (11:32) would bring about repentance in the people of his day.”

The reference is to Jesus’ death and burial in which He would be in the tomb for “three days and three nights” and then be resurrected from the dead. None of this is explained at this point. The “three days and three nights” must be explained in the way the Jews counted their days. Their day began at 6 o’clock in the evening. This means that, if Jesus died around 3 PM on Friday, that was counted as day one. From 6 PM Friday to 6 PM Saturday was two days. The time beyond 6 PM Saturday, that is till Sunday morning at daybreak, was counted as day three. In our calculation it would only be a period of about 33 hours, or one day and a half.

The point Jesus wanted to make here is that He was greater than Jonah and than King Solomon. His superiority to Jonah was as a prophet and to Solomon as the wisest of Israel’s kings. The reference to Jonah points to the task God had given to Israel as they were at the foot of Mount Sinai and God told them that they were to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”⁴³⁰ As priests they were to share God’s revelation to them with the rest of the world. Israel never understood this. Jonah was the only Jew in all of the Old Testament history who preached God’s testimony to the outside world and he did this reluctantly.

Jesus would be, in the words of the Apostle John: “the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”⁴³¹ The statement that Jesus is greater than Jonah needs no further comment.

In the example of Jonah, Israel preached to the outside world. In the example of the Queen of Sheba, the outside world came to Israel. There is a world that is hungry for God’s revelation, but those to whom that revelation was given were not willing to share it with the world.

Working as a missionary among the Stone Age tribes of Papua, Indonesia, we learned that the people had old myths about times past in which God walked among the people on earth. No one died. But when sin entered, God went back to heaven and took eternal life with Him. The people believed, however, that one day eternal life would be given back to them. When the Gospel was preached to them, they identified that message with the hope they had preserved for generations.

On the Day of Judgment, Israel will stand accused and the accusers will be the men of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba. Stone Age tribes will take the witness stand and accuse Christians of the Western world of withholding the truth of God’s revelation.

Jesus’ words give us some understanding of God’s judgment on the last day of world history. A jury, consisting of human beings, will pronounce the verdict. The issue will be the testimony about Jesus Christ, “the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

3. The light that is in you 11:33-36

33 *“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light.”*

34 *Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness.*

35 *See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.*

36 *Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.”*

⁴²⁹ Matt. 12:39-41

⁴³⁰ Ex. 19:6

⁴³¹ I John 2:2

40 You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?

41 But give what is inside [the dish] to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

A superficial glance at this incident would make us conclude that something was lacking in Jesus' table manners. Most of us believe that it is proper and hygienic to wash hands before sitting down at a table for a meal. But Leon Morris, in *Luke*, explains: "When Jesus came in, the Pharisee *was astonished* that he did not wash (the verb is *baptizō*) before the meal. This had nothing to do with hygiene, but was a rule made in the interest of ceremonial purity. Before eating anything, scrupulous Jews had water poured over their hands to remove the defilement contracted by their contact with a sinful world. The quantity of water and the manner of washing are prescribed in minute detail in the Mishnah ... the Pharisees clearly expected that Jesus, as a noted religious teacher, would conform to the accepted practice."

Luke does not provide us with some of the details that lead up to the following rebuke Jesus gives to His host and to Pharisees in general. We may imagine that all the implements needed for the washing ceremony were available and that Jesus' host was the first one to wash his hands. This, probably, means that a slave came with a washing bowl and poured the water over his master's hand. He then proceeded to Jesus in order to perform the same ceremony, which Jesus declined. Jesus' host must have voiced his surprise. The Greek verb used is *thaumazo*, which has the primary meaning of "to admire," or "to wonder." It has obviously a negative connotation in this context. One example of the negative context in which the same words is used is in: "And he was *amazed* at their lack of faith."⁴³⁵ The Pharisee may have made the remark that Jesus was actually ceremoniously unclean, and therefore, unfit to be his guest.

In His answer Jesus uses a short parable of a cup that has been cleaned on the outside but is filled with an impure substance. The Pharisees had taken God's command in Leviticus: "be holy, because I am holy,"⁴³⁶ and reduced it to a ceremonial exterior article without any inner meaning or character. The holiness God required is holiness of character, not merely an outward cleaning. A murderer or adulterer who takes a bath remains a murderer or adulterer.

David prayed in his Psalm of confession: "Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow."⁴³⁷

Bible scholars have argued extensively about the meaning of Jesus' words. The Greek text of v.39 reads literally: "[You] fools, did not he that made that which [is] without also make that which [is] within?" We could interpret "that which is without" as being the ceremonial part and "that which is within" as the actual meaning of the ceremony. David understood that being cleansed with hyssop stood for receiving a clean heart. The Pharisees were not interested in clean hearts, in receiving forgiveness, in grace; they only wanted to look good and be praised for it.

The instructions in v.41 – "but give what is inside [the dish] to the poor, and everything will be clean for you" are difficult for us to understand because they still seem to be part of the parable. Giving to the poor, whether it is the inside of the dish, or anything else, is a demonstration of neighborly love. And one can only love one's neighbor if one loves God with heart and soul and mind. That may be the best way to look at this expression. Most of the actions performed by Pharisees were out of self-love.

5. Woe to the Pharisees 11:42-44

42 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

43 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

44 "Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it."

⁴³⁵ Mark 6:6

⁴³⁶ Lev. 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7,26

⁴³⁷ Ps. 51:6,7

Jesus then proceeds in giving examples of the way the Pharisees interpreted the Mosaic Law about tithing. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “Probably the primitive Law of *Moses*, which directed that a tenth of every income in Israel should be given up to the service of the invisible King alone, referred to such important products as corn, and wine, and oil, and the like; but the present elaboration of the Law and the Pharisee schools had extended the primitive obligation to the smallest garden herbs, such as mint and rue. The Talmud even condescends to discuss whether, in tithing the seeds of these garden herbs, the very stalk too ought not to be tithed! The Master, ever tender and considerate, does not blame this exaggerated scrupulosity, if it were done to satisfy even a warped and distorted conscience; what he does find fault with, though, and in the bitterest terms language can formulate, is the substitution of and the clear preference for these infinitely lower duties for the higher.”

The Pharisees used tithing as a substitute for the love of God. They acted as if the Creator of the universe, the One who created the earth and all the things that grow, could be bought off by the things that He had created Himself. The principle of tithing is a recognition that all one has belongs to God. He has a claim on all our possessions. All we have is borrowed from Him and we owe Him an account of all we do with it. People who do not recognize this steal from God and then try to pacify Him by giving Him back ten percent of the spoil.

Next, Jesus reproaches them that they seek public recognition and honor by occupying the important seats in the synagogue. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “The front seats in the synagogues were usually reserved for the most important.” We read in John’s Gospel that Jesus said: “How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”⁴³⁸ Thirst for public recognition and praise brings us into the realm of the enemy and endangers our eternal destiny.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on Jesus’ comparing the Pharisees to unmarked graves: “To come into contact with a grave was to incur ceremonial defilement. A problem was posed by the fact that people were sometimes buried in unmarked graves and the unwary traveler could easily walk over such a grave and all unwittingly contract ceremonial defilement. There is irony in the comparison of the religious Pharisees, who thought so well of themselves, to the unsuspected sources of defilement. People who walked over unmarked graves became ceremonially unclean. And people who walked in the teaching and ways of the Pharisees became morally unclean.”

6. Woe to the lawyers 11:45-54

45 *One of the experts in the law answered him, “Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.”*

46 *Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.*

47 *“Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them.*

48 *So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs.*

49 *Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’*

50 *Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world,*

51 *from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.*

52 *“Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.”*

53 *When Jesus left there, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions,*

54 *waiting to catch him in something he might say.*

⁴³⁸ John 5:44

We assume that we are still at the table of the Pharisee who had invited Jesus for a meal. From these verses we learn that Jesus was not the only guests. Most of what Luke reports here can be found in Matthew's Gospel.⁴³⁹ But Matthew places Jesus' remarks in a different context. But we must remember that Matthew has a tendency to collect all his material in the same way as a bookkeeper keeps a ledger. Having been a tax collector, Matthew kept his old profession in the way he reported the facts of salvation.

One of the lawyers present voiced his opinion that Jesus not only insulted his host and the other Pharisees present, but also himself as a doctor of Old Testament and his whole profession.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "It did not follow that all these professed jurists were of the Pharisee sect; some, doubtless, were Sadducees. It seems, however, probable that the greater proportion of these professional teachers and expounders of the Law did belong to the Pharisees. The oral and written Law, based upon the comparatively simple Mosaic code, had now become the absolute guide and director of the whole life of the people in all its smaller details. The various copyists, lecturers, teachers, and casuists, who debated the many doubtful points constantly arising in the perplexing and elaborate system, were all known under the general term 'scribes.' The *lawyer* was the scribe who had especially devoted his attention to the unravelment of the difficult and disputed questions which arose in the daily life of the people. This lawyer was certainly, considering the company he was associated with, of the strictest sect of Pharisees. This person could not believe that this able Rabbi from Galilee — for that they must all, after the morning's discussion, have allowed Jesus to be — could include him and his holy order in his terrible denunciations, the truth of which the learned scribe not improbably dimly discerned."

Turning to this professional, Jesus utters one of the most scathing denunciations of the way the professionals interpreted the Old Testament Law. *The Pulpit Commentary* continues: "How true was the expression, 'burdens grievous to be borne,' a very superficial study of the Talmud will amply show; for although even the earliest parts of that stupendous compilation were not committed to writing until some time after, yet very much of what we now peruse in those strange, weary treatises existed then in the *oral tradition* which it was the life-work of scholars and pedants, like the lawyer to whom Jesus was then speaking, to learn, to expound, and to amplify; and these vexatious and frivolous ordinances which the lawyers and scribes pressed home upon the people with such urgency were often shirked and avoided by the learned and cultured scribe-class as a body."

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, adds: "The *burdens hard to bear* were the scribal interpretations of the Law and the traditions of the elders. These were taken with the utmost seriousness. The Mishnah lays it down that it is more important to observe the scribal interpretations than the Law itself ... The reasoning is that if it was a serious matter to offend against the Law which was sometimes hard to understand, it was a much more serious matter to offend against the interpretation which, the scribes thought, made everything clear. The lawyers ought to have expounded God's Law in such a way that it helped and inspired people. Instead they made it a wearisome burden. The lawyers' failure to *touch the burdens with one of your fingers* may mean that they did not lift a finger to help other people, or that their interpretations enabled them to escape themselves. They did not need even to use one finger. Perhaps we can see something of the situation by considering an example. On the sabbath, they taught, a man may not carry a burden 'in his right hand or in his left hand, in his bosom or on his shoulder.' But he may carry it 'on the back of his hand, or with his foot or with his mouth or with his elbow, or in his ear or in his hair or in his wallet (carried) mouth downwards, or between his wallet and his shirt, or in the hem of his shirt, or in his shoe or in his sandal' ... Multiply this by all the regulations of the Law and ordinary people have a burden beyond bearing even to know what they might do and might not do. But there is also a multitude of loopholes for a lawyer who knew the traditions which enabled him to do pretty well what he wished."

7. The leaven of the Pharisees 12:1-3

1 Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

2 There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

⁴³⁹ Matt. 23:25-36

3 What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

In introducing these verses, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “The saying about the leaven is in all three Synoptic Gospels, but that about revealing what is covered is lacking in Mark and is found in a different context in Matthew. This should not trouble us greatly. There is no reason for holding that the selection or arrangement of material must be the same in all three Gospels. And in any case there is every reason for thinking that Jesus repeated his teaching on different occasions with slight variations.”

It is obvious that what Luke describes here took no longer place in the house of the Pharisee that had invited Jesus to dinner. And it is not necessary to assume that this scene followed immediately upon the previous one.

Jesus uses the term “yeast” here as an image of hypocrisy. At other times He used the same word in a positive context as in comparing the Kingdom of God to a woman who uses yeast to bake bread. We read: “What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”⁴⁴⁰

In the celebration of the Passover, yeast was banned from the meal and from the house. For a whole week, following the Passover, the Israelites were commanded to eat bread without yeast.⁴⁴¹ Nothing baked with yeast could be brought as a sacrifice, except in the wave-offering on Pentecost.⁴⁴²

The yeast used in Biblical times was actually a lump of dough kept from previous baking, which had begun to decompose. The bacteria that had started to rot the dough would make a new batch of dough rise and produce the fluffy kind of bread such as we eat nowadays.

In the image used yeast stands for a form of moral corruption. In the case of the Pharisees it was their hypocrisy Jesus talked about. The Apostle Paul uses the same image, not of personal corruption, but of the fellowship of a church that had turned sour. The church in Corinth had allowed a person, who openly lived in sin, to remain as a member in their midst. Paul wrote to them: “Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast — as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.”⁴⁴³

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “hypocrisy” as: “a feigning to be what one is not or to believe what one does not; the false assumption of an appearance of virtue or religion.” The Pharisees wanted people to believe that they lived a life of surrender to God and obedience to His will, while in reality they were self-serving and sin-loving. They used piety as a cover.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes about Jesus’ use of the picture of yeast or leaven: “The metaphor would have been more obvious then than now, for people tended to make their own bread and everyone would be familiar with the way a little leaven slowly transforms a large lump of dough. Leaven speaks of a penetration that is slow, insidious and constant. In this case the leaven is *hypocrisy*. The practice of saying one thing and doing another eats at the moral life like a canker. Many things could be said about hypocrisy, but on this occasion Jesus chooses to point out that it is short-sighted. The art of being a hypocrite depends on the ability to keep some things concealed. When concealment is no longer possible the hypocrite is inevitably unmasked. At present the Pharisees may have certain things *covered up*, or *hidden*. But in the end, on judgment day, all will be known. People may think they have said things safely in secret, but all will be brought into *the light*. They have *whispered in private rooms*. These are really ‘store rooms,’ but, where wall could be easily dug through, store chambers tended to be inner rooms well away from exterior walls and thus the secondary meaning ‘inner rooms’ developed. But what has been whispered so secretly will be *proclaimed upon the housetops*. A housetop would give a speaker a first-rate platform from which his voice could sound out, so Jesus is referring to the fullest publicity.”

⁴⁴⁰ Luke 13:20,21

⁴⁴¹ Ex. 12:15

⁴⁴² Lev. 23:17

⁴⁴³ I Cor. 5:6-8

Jesus' words about things concealed and words whispered in secret, pertain, first of all, to the hypocritical lifestyle of the Pharisees. They would present a pious attitude in the street, but would "let their hair down" at home. There is, however, a general application, that is meant for all. Since sin entered the world we all use masks in one form or another. No one is totally authentic. We all need to pray David's prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."⁴⁴⁴ Shakespeare makes one of his characters in Hamlet say: "This above all, to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." While here on earth, no one will be able to totally live up to this advice. Only the Holy Spirit can overrule our hypocrisy. We will only be an aroma of Christ in this world, if we are an aroma of Christ to God, to use Paul's words.⁴⁴⁵ And the Apostle adds: "And who is equal to such a task?"

We need the covering of Jesus Christ in our heart and head in the same way as Adam and Eve needed God's covering for their shame of being naked.

8. Be ready for judgment 12:4-12

4 *"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.*

5 *But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.*

6 *Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.*

7 *Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*

8 *"I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God.*

9 *But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.*

10 *And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.*

11 *"When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say,*

12 *for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."*

As Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes, "Jesus calls the disciples friends here only in the Synoptic Gospels (but cf. John 15:14)." But what He says to His disciples is more than a friendly warning; it pertains to that which controls the behavior of mankind in general. Our lives are governed by the fear of death. Many people can be made to do what they do not want, or are not inclined to do, when threatened with death. We fear people, because they can kill us. The author of Hebrews writes that one of the main reasons for Jesus coming to earth is to deliver us from that fear. We read: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."⁴⁴⁶

Our fear is based on shortsightedness. Since we cannot see what happens beyond death, we act as if death is the end of all existence. Death came into the world by disobedience to the will of God. It means separation from God. If we surrender to God's will by believing on Jesus Christ, we will experience victory over death and the fear of death also. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the guarantee of our resurrection.

The fear of death is spoken of here particularly in the context of persecution of those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. The question would be: "Is what I believe worth giving my life for?"

We rarely put surrender of our life in the context of paying the ultimate price of physical death. We must look upon surrender as enlisting in God's army and being sent to the lines of battle where death is a daily reality. To volunteer and go and then to desert in the face of danger is treated as betrayal. In speaking about

⁴⁴⁴ Ps. 139:23,24

⁴⁴⁵ II Cor. 2:15

⁴⁴⁶ Heb. 2:14,15

“Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell” Jesus speaks of God who will stand in judgment over those who betrayed Him. He is *Yahweh Sabaoth*, “the Commander in Chief,” “the Lord of Hosts.” And He has the power to throw away our eternal soul in hell. The Greek word used is *geena*. There are several Greek words used in the New Testament to describe the abode of the dead. Originally, *geena*, or *Gehenna* was used as a general description of the dwelling of the dead. The word borrowed from Greek mythology is *Hades*, which also has the same general meaning; not indication condemnation as such. The Hebrew equivalent would be *Sheol*.

Gehenna was the name given to the valley of Hinnom, a valley just outside Jerusalem, where at some times Moloch had been worshipped and which was desecrated for that use by King Josiah by dumping dead bodies into the place. Eventually, it became the city’s garbage dump, in which the refuse was burned. That was the picture Jesus had in mind when He said: “And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’”⁴⁴⁷

After having portrayed the Almighty God as the highest authority in judgment, Jesus shows us immediately the other side of the picture, portraying God, the Creator, the Father, whose heart is deeply affected by the death of the smallest of His creatures. To show this compassionate side of God’s character is not meant to take away any of His glorious authority as the supreme judge. It indicates, though, that if God meets out justice, He does not do it gleefully but with great sorrow. The corruption of His creation affects Him more deeply than the human mind can comprehend.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “But his basic concern is to reassure his friends, not to frighten them. He goes on immediately to the care God has for his people and illustrates from the little birds. *Five sparrows* were sold for *two pennies*. Matthew tells us that two sparrows went for a penny. Evidently one was thrown in for nothing when two pennyworth were bought. But *not one of them* (not even the free one) *is forgotten before God*. God takes notice of the commonest and cheapest of birds. Much more, then, will he be concerned for people. Jesus brings out this point with the information that the hairs of our heads are all numbered. The importance of this does not lie in the actual count, but in the fact that God cares enough about his people to know the minutest details about them. He knows things they do not know about themselves. So those who are *of more value than many sparrows* should face life without fear.”

The fate of the sparrows that were sold is not mentioned here. Poor people would probably buy them for food, which makes the picture stand out more vividly in comparing God’s compassion with man’s lack of it.

V.8 reminds us that the whole point of the text is our testimony about Jesus and how much we are willing to pay for it. The picture changes here from five cute little birds who fall victim to man’s appetite, to people who are burned at the stake because they refuse to recant their faith in Jesus Christ, who saved their souls. This places the sin against the Holy Spirit in a much more dramatic light than earlier when people accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul. The blaspheming of the Holy Spirit could take the form of someone saying that it was Satan who made him say that Jesus was the Savior and the Son of God.

There is a twofold danger in the way we can look at Jesus’ words. For some of us, our Christian faith is part of the culture in which we were born and grew up. The thought that our faith in Christ and our testimony concerning Him could threaten our very life is as far away from us as can be. We must be careful not to promise Jesus that we are willing to die with Him, as Peter did.⁴⁴⁸ All we can do is asking for grace to face the crisis when it presents itself. Only the Holy Spirit can give us the courage we need.

On the other hand, if our faith in Christ is not precious enough that we would be willing to die for it if need be, we may wonder where we have faith at all.

In v.11 Jesus looks particularly to the period, shortly after Pentecost, when the early Christians were challenged by the Jewish authorities and when some paid for their faith in Christ with their lives. What Jesus is saying is that it is not the people who believe who will be on trial, but the Holy Spirit. And the

⁴⁴⁷ Mark 9:47,48

⁴⁴⁸ Matt. 26:35; Mark 14:31

Holy Spirit will defend Himself. Commenting on Jesus' words, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states, rather drily, that they are "An instruction for martyrs, not for preachers or teachers."

9. The rich fool 12:13-21

13 *Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."*

14 *Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"*

15 *Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

16 *And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop.*

17 *He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'*

18 *"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.*

19 *And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"*

20 *"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'*

21 *"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*

We are given no details about the legality of the case brought to Jesus by someone in the crowd. The man was probably the younger son in a family where the father had died and where the inheritance was being disputed. The law allotted a double portion of an inheritance to the oldest son. Whether big brother had taken more than what was rightfully his, or had not shared at all, we are not told. The man who called upon Jesus to judge, approach Him as he would approach any Jewish rabbi. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: "The man is taking Jesus as a typical rabbi, for the rabbis customarily gave decisions on disputed points of law. Jesus, however, refused to have anything to do with it."

We must not conclude from this incident that Jesus condoned injustice. In the parable that follows, He brings out the danger of materialism and the importance of family relationships, based upon a relationship with God.

His remark: "Who made you ruler and judge over us?" is borrowed from an episode in the life of Moses. While the Israelites were in slavery in Egypt, Moses saw two men fighting and when he tried to interfere and break up the fight, one of the men said these words to him.⁴⁴⁹ Stephen refers to the episode in his defense before the Sanhedrin.⁴⁵⁰ There is a touch of humor in the fact that Jesus quoted the man who did not want Moses' interference, and spoke them to a man who asked for Jesus' interference.

The point of Jesus' warning to this man is that family relations will suffer if our relationship with God is not our primary relationship in life. Materialism and greed are only a few things that can keep brothers living together in unity.⁴⁵¹ The statement that "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" is one of the great statements in the Bible that describe the value of human life. Jesus said elsewhere: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"⁴⁵² The human soul is worth more than all worldly possessions because it is eternal. In the words of the Apostle John: "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."⁴⁵³

Yet, we tend to express the value of a human being in terms of how much he possesses. We say about some people that they are worth five million or ten millions dollars. If that is all one is worth, he is not worth much!

⁴⁴⁹ Ex. 2:14

⁴⁵⁰ Acts 7:26-29

⁴⁵¹ Ps. 133:1

⁴⁵² Matt. 16:26; Mark 8:36

⁴⁵³ I John 2:17

The point of the parable, in which Jesus tells the story of a man whose bumper crop made him rich, is human shortsightedness. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: “The Greek word rendered ‘barns’ (*apothekas* — whence our word ‘apothecary’) has a broader signification than merely barns; it signifies store or warehouses of all kinds, thus suggesting that the hero of the story was more than a mere wealthy farmer — he was probably also a trader.”

The rich man’s problem was that he did not ask God what he was supposed to do with that which was entrusted to him. As a matter of fact, God did not enter the picture at all in this man’s vision. He believed that the crop was his, not God’s. He did not understand that his possessions were given on loan to him. The nineteenth century Scottish writer, George MacDonald asked the question: “Do you believe that God can punish someone by making him rich?” He answered this in the affirmative.

Agur son of Jakeh prayed this insightful prayer: “Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”⁴⁵⁴ The only rich people in this world are those who are rich in God.

10. Seek the kingdom 12:22-34

22 *Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.*

23 *Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.*

24 *Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!*

25 *Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?*

26 *Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?*

27 *“Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.*

28 *If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!*

29 *And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.*

30 *For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.*

31 *But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.*

32 *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*

33 *Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.*

34 *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Much of what Luke places in the context of Jesus’ remarks to His disciples, following the request about the sharing of a heritage, is found in *Matthew’s Gospel* as part of *The Sermon on the Mount*.⁴⁵⁵

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “From the sins of greed and selfishness Jesus turns to that of that of worry, which in a way is connected with the other two. ‘Greed can never *get* enough, worry is afraid it may not *have* enough’ ... Wealth can represent a danger to those who do not have it as well as to those who do. Jesus emphasizes the importance of trust in God and detachment from things.

The previous words were addressed to the crowd, these to Jesus’ *disciples*. What he now says arises from his previous words, as *Therefore I tell you* shows, but this is not teaching for the masses. It is to his own

⁴⁵⁴ Prov. 30:7-9

⁴⁵⁵ Matt. 6:19-21, 25-34

that Jesus says, *do not be anxious about your life*. The believer may take reasonable forethought for his needs, but he is not to worry about food or clothing. Life is bigger than such things (cf. 12:15).”

Jesus does not teach irresponsibility in connection with provisions for our life on earth. We are responsible for our personal health and welfare as well as for those who have been entrusted to us. But we must see ourselves in this role as stewards, not as creators of means and sustenance. God is our ultimate caretaker. Isaiah assures us that God will always provide us with that which is needed for our basic needs, as long as we live according to His will. We read: “He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil — this is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him.”⁴⁵⁶ And most of us can testify that there are also desserts on God’s menu, more often than not.

In Matthew’s version, Jesus speaks of God’s provision for “the birds of the air.” Luke focuses particularly on “the ravens.” This is the only place in the New Testament where these birds are mentioned by name. Here we find the ravens as being provided for; in the Old Testaments, they are mentioned as the providers for the prophet Elijah who was kept live by them during the famine that struck Israel during the reign of Ahab.⁴⁵⁷

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “What a contrast between the life of the rich and prosperous landowner just related, whose whole heart and soul were concentrated on a toil which should procure him dainty food and costly raiment, and these fowls fed by God so abundantly, and those flowers clothed by God so royally! The ravens knew nothing of the anxious care and the restless toil of the rich man in the midst of which he died, and yet they lived. The lilies simply grew, and God’s hand painted the rich and gorgeous clothing for each golden-jeweled flower; Solomon, the splendid Jewish king, the example of all that was magnificent, was never arrayed, men knew, like one of these lilies. With such a God above them, who surely loved each one as he never loved a bird or flower, was it worth while to wear a life away in toiling for less than what God simply gave to raven and to lily? Such was the Master’s argument, adorned, we may well conceive, with all the beauty and force of Eastern illustration.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states: “There is possibly significance in the fact that ravens were unclean (Lev. 11:15). God makes provision even for these unclean birds. And Jesus goes on to remind his hearers that they are of more value than birds (cf. v.7).”

In the story of the rich fool, who died the night he had planned to start living it up, death had crept up on him without his taking into consideration that he could die. Jesus speaks here about people who think about death and worry about it, but cannot do anything to prolong their lives. Worry may shorten one’s life but it cannot extend it.

Jesus had already pointed out that life and body are more important than food and clothes. Our earthly possessions can distract us from seeing what is essential. Food without life has no importance and clothing without a body has no use. It is what God provides that is important; without that our efforts to sustain are meaningless or non-existent.

But the point Jesus wants to make is that, if God furnishes us with the essential, we can expect Him to provide that which sustains also. Paul’s recipe for worry is: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”⁴⁵⁸ The antidote to worry is prayer and an attitude of gratitude.

The first illustration about the ravens emphasized provision for food, the second image shows us the flowers as an example of God’s provision for clothing. If Adam and Eve had not sinned, the need for clothing would never have become an issue. The beauty of the human body would have outshone the beauty of the lilies or of any other kind of flower. Our need for clothing emphasizes our need for cover, not only physically, but also spiritually and emotionally.

⁴⁵⁶ Isa. 33:15,16

⁴⁵⁷ I Kings 17:2-6

⁴⁵⁸ Phil. 4:6,7

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on the examples Jesus gives: “The argument is irresistible. If God does all this for the flowers that disappear so quickly, *how much more* will he clothe his people? *O men of little faith* shows that some of the disciples had shown anxiety. It is needless.

Jesus commands (not advices) his followers not to worry. Worry is a great inhibitor of action; to live in worry is to miss what life is all about. The disciples are not to *seek* food and drink. This does not, of course, exclude legitimate effort, but it does prohibit concentration on these items. Phillips gets the meaning with ‘You must not set your heart on what you eat or drink’ (cf. the rich fool, 16-20). Similarly the disciples are not to be *of anxious mind*. Worry about food and clothing may befit *the nations of the world* (a common rabbinic designation of the Gentiles ...), but it is not proper to God’s people. *Your Father knows that you need them*; and he who knows the need will supply it.

From the negative Jesus turns to the positive and instructs the disciples how to live. They are *to seek his kingdom*, which point to a concentration on all that the kingdom involves. Disciples have pledged themselves to their Master. They must accordingly spend their time in doing his work and seeking his kingdom. This will mean trying to produce in their own lives conduct appropriate to those who have accepted the rule of God. It will also mean trying to bring others into a like way of living, for it is in this way that the kingdom grows. Jesus adds the information that when his followers concentrate on the kingdom, *these things shall be yours as well*. When people truly honor God, God honors their faith. His servants may not grow wealthy as the world understands riches, but they will not lack.

Little flock is an unusual form of address, found only here in the New Testament. The Psalms and prophets, of course, frequently use the word ‘flock’ for people of God (e.g. Ps. 77:20; Isa. 40:11; Mic. 4:8; 5:4). It speaks of the small number of true disciples, but also of the care they may expect from their Shepherd. Indeed Jesus goes straight on to speak of the Father’s gifts to his people. These are not wrung from him as though he were unwilling to give: it is his *good pleasure* to give. And his gift is *the kingdom*, that very kingdom they have just been told to seek.”

“Sell your possessions” is not an order, but an advice or suggestion to those for whom material possessions are their security. It was the advice Jesus gave to the ruler who came to ask Him about eternal life. The story is found in the three Synoptic Gospels.⁴⁵⁹ There is no law against possessing material goods. It is when material goods possess us that we are in trouble. David had the right perspective when he said: “Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”⁴⁶⁰ Those who know that they are using what God has given to them to use will have no need to sell. Their purses are heavenly purses. If what we have belongs to God, we have no right to sell what is not ours. The problem is not with the possessions, but with the heart. The author of Hebrews advises: “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’”⁴⁶¹ It is when money becomes our defense against what we fear from our fellowmen, that we have lost the realization what life is all about.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the words “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys”: “In considering these much-disputed words of the Master, we must remember

- (1) *to whom* they were spoken: they were addressed to men and women who, if they would follow him, *must* set themselves free from all worldly possessions; they must literally forsake *all* to follow him.
- (2) We must bear in mind
 - (a) that the only community which attempted, as a community, to obey this charge *literally* was the Church of Jerusalem, and the result was that for long years this Church was plunged into the deepest poverty, so that assistance had to be sent even from far-distant Churches to this deeply impoverished Jerusalem community. [This we learn from Paul, the real compiler of this very Gospel, where the charge is reported. See many passages in his letters, notably the Second Epistle to the Corinthians].

⁴⁵⁹ Matt. 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22

⁴⁶⁰ I Chron. 29:14

⁴⁶¹ Heb. 13:5,6

- (b) The mendicant orders in the *Middle Ages*, with no little bravery and constancy, likewise attempted to carry out to the letter this direction. The impartial student of mediaeval history, while doing all justice to the aims and work of these often devoted men, can judge whether or not these mendicant orders can be reckoned among the *permanently* successful agencies of the cross. We conclude, then, that these words had a *literal* meaning only for those to whom they were specially addressed, viz. the disciples. While to the Church generally they convey this deep, far-reaching lesson, a lesson all would-be servants of Christ would do well to take to heart — it is the Master’s will that his followers *should sit loose* to all *earthly possessions, possessing them as though they possessed not*. Thus living, the heart will be free from all inordinate care for earthly treasure, and will, in real earnest, turn to that serene region where its real and abiding riches indeed are — even to heaven.”

We must also bear in mind that what we consider to be treasures are only a shadow of the reality that exists in heaven. As Jesus pointed out earlier, there is a possibility to be “rich” on earth, and not be “rich” in God. The earthly gold is only an image of the real gold of which the streets of the New Jerusalem are made.⁴⁶² And the New Jerusalem is “the bride of the Lamb,”⁴⁶³ which is a person, not a construction. The real treasure is the spiritual reality of fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. Having this relationship comes in a purse that will never wear out. It will fill our heart to the brim with eternal satisfaction.

11. The coming of the Son of man 12:35-40

35 *“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning,*

36 like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.

37 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.

38 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.

39 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.

40 *You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “We naturally interpret this of the second coming, but many scholars feel that this would have been incomprehensible to Jesus’ hearers. They hold that Jesus is warning them to be ready for a crisis, which is probably to be seen in the events surrounding the crucifixion. It is hard to exclude such a meaning and there is a permanent application in that Jesus’ followers must always be ready to face the crises of life in the spirit of true discipleship. But it is impossible to hold that this exhausts the meaning. There is the fuller reference that looks forward to the second coming.”

The fact that Jesus’ words would be “incomprehensible” to the hearers of His day, does not seem to have kept Jesus from saying them at other occasions. Jesus counted on the fact that the Holy Spirit would come after His death and resurrection and interpret that which had been unintelligible. That is why He said to His disciples: “All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”⁴⁶⁴

What is more difficult to grasp for us is that these words suggest that the time of the second coming was at hand. Those who heard Jesus say these words all died without being witnesses of the event. More than two millennia after they were spoken, we are still waiting for them to happen. In the first century some believers began to be restless and some even became “scoffers,” as the Apostle Peter calls them. We read in his Second Epistle: “They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are

⁴⁶² Rev. 21:21

⁴⁶³ Rev. 21:9,10

⁴⁶⁴ John 14:25,26

reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”⁴⁶⁵

Peter called the story Jesus told to illustrate His point a “parable.” The story fit well into the culture of the people of that time. There is a wedding banquet to which a man has been invited. He is a person of means who has servants at home, who are supposed to wait for him and upon him. He expects them to be awake and ready, even if he comes home in the middle of the night. That part of the story is easy to understand. What is difficult to see is that the master of the house would treat his servants with such gratitude and respect that he would become their servant and serve them. That is where the analogy in the story breaks down. No master would do this to honor those who merely did what they were supposed to do. But that is what Jesus did to His disciples and what God does to His creatures. That is what made Jesus wash His disciples’ feet. That is what made Him give His life as a ransom for the sins of the world.⁴⁶⁶

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “Any *master* who finds his servants in such a state of readiness is pleased. This one is so pleased that he reverses the normal roles and has them sit at the table while he serves them a meal. This unexpected twist cannot be taken from life, but is something extra provided for God’s people (cf. 22:27). But then the reward of God’s people is never commonplace: it is always the unexpected.” The embedded reference reads: “For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”⁴⁶⁷

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “The title ‘blessed,’ when used by our Lord, is ever a very lofty one, and implies some rare and precious virtue in the one to whom this title to honor is given. It seems as though the house-master of the parable scarcely expected such true devotion from his servants; so he hastens to reward a rare virtue with equally rare blessedness and honor. He raises the slaves to a position of equality with their master. These true faithful ones are no longer his servants; they are his friends. He even deigns himself to minister to their wants. A similar lofty promise is made in less homely language. The final glorious gift to the faithful conqueror in the world’s hard battle appears in the last of the epistles to the seven Churches: ‘To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with *me* in my throne’ (... Revelation 3:21).”

The story of vv.39 and 40 is clearly a different parable from the preceding one. There are no servants and there is no master who comes home in the middle of the night. The visitor is unexpected and unwanted. This is a break-in by a thief. In Matthew’s rendering of the story there is the addition: “So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”⁴⁶⁸ And to the church in Sardis, Jesus says in Revelation: “But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.”⁴⁶⁹ For some people the return of Christ will not only be at an unexpected time, but it will also be an unpleasant surprise. Their lifestyle and acts will be revealed and they will find themselves guilty and embarrassed before the Lord whose presence had always been denied in their daily lives.

12. The responsibility of the servant 12:41-48

41 Peter asked, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?”

42 The Lord answered, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?”

43 It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns.

44 I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

45 But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk.

⁴⁶⁵ II Peter 3:4-9

⁴⁶⁶ Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45

⁴⁶⁷ Luke 22:27

⁴⁶⁸ Matt. 24:44

⁴⁶⁹ Rev. 3:3

46 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

47 “That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows.

48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

The next parable is triggered by Peter’s question about the application of the previous story. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states: “Only Luke tells us that it was Peter who asked, but the question is quite in character. As he often did, Jesus countered with another question to make his questioner think. The *steward* was a slave (he is called *doulos* in v. 43), to whom was given the task of managing the whole estate. This freed the owner from routine administration and it meant that the steward necessarily had considerable freedom of action. If he was *faithful and wise* he would see that the estate was properly run, which included making sure that all members of the household were duly fed. Jesus speaks of a situation wherein the *master* is absent but returns unexpectedly (43). A diligent steward, whom his master found working efficiently when he thus returned suddenly, would be promoted (44).”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “Peter’s question here referred evidently to the longer and more important parable-story, where the reward which the faithful watchers were to receive is mentioned (ver. 37). The grandeur of that reward seems deeply to have impressed the impulsive apostle. Some true conception of the heaven-life had entered into Peter’s mind; we know, too, that now and again dimly Peter seemed to grasp the secret of his Master’s awful Divinity. What meant, then, thought the faithful, loving man, the figure in the parable of the lord? Who was that lord — *himself serving* his faithful followers? The same curious perplexity evidently passed through Peter’s mind when, on the evening before the death, in a symbolic act the Master repeated the words of the great promise made here, and washed his disciples’ feet. Then we read how Peter said to him, ‘Lord, dost *thou* wash *my* feet?’ Were *all* who followed Jesus to share in that strange, mighty promise; or only a few, such as Peter and his companions, called for a special purpose?”

The story is not a direct answer to Peter’s question. It is rather an admonition to faithfulness in the role God has assigned to each person individually. The main figure in this parable is the “manager.” The Greek word used is *oikonomos*, which is a combination of the words for “house” and “to distribute.” It is the person who is in charge of the servants in the house. The master of the house has delegated his own authority to this man and trusts him with running his business for him.

Here again, the lord of the manor is absent, leaving the steward in charge. In vv.42-44 the steward carries out his responsibilities conscientiously and receives praise at the master’s return. Peter and the other disciples must have understood who the Master was Jesus spoke about and they must have identified with the steward. In writing to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul also saw himself as the kind of steward Jesus speaks about here. We read: “So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”⁴⁷⁰

The steward in the second part of the story fails to see himself as a man under authority, as one who will have to account for the way he carried out his responsibilities upon his master’s return. A sense of accountability is a good guide of conduct. Peter’s question was whether accountability would be required from the Lord’s servants only, or whether it pertained to everyone. In His answer, Jesus makes it clear that we will all stand before the judge of our life to give account of how we handled the trust given to us.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Apparently he pays no heed to Peter’s question, but *really* he answers it fully, giving in fact more details on the subject of rewards to the faithful in the life to come than even Peter’s question required. ‘Who then,’ asks the Lord, ‘is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* lord shall make ruler ever his household?’ Who? Peter must answer the question. *This* steward should be Peter himself and each of Peter’s chosen companions. *This* high position of steward in the household of the Lord

⁴⁷⁰ I Cor. 4:1,2

should be filled by those whom Jesus had specially chosen. If, when he came again, the Lord found *these* faithful to their solemn trust, then *these* should receive a still higher and grander recompense even than that inconceivably splendid reward (mentioned in ver. 37) which had so struck Peter; and the higher recompense which these, the faithful and wise stewards, should then receive would be *the being made rulers over all that the Lord hath*. The answer of the Master then told Peter that all his followers, if found true and loyal, should receive the reward promised (in ver. 37) to the watching servants, who in the world to come would be not the *servants* but the *friends* of God. While the *few*, the chosen apostles of the Lord, if *they* endured to the end, if *they* were found wise and faithful, to them would be given in the new life a yet more glorious recompense; they would be set in some special position of government and dominion in the glorious city of God. This teaches, too, indirectly, but with great clearness, that in the heaven-life *all* Christ's redeemed will enjoy in the friendship of God a perfect blessedness. Still, in that perfect blessedness which will be the heritage of all the redeemed, there will still be degrees in glory."

13. Fire on the earth 12:49-53

49 "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"

50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!

51 Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.

52 From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.

53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Bible scholars have debated what Jesus meant with "I have come to bring fire on the earth." Some interpret this as the fire of the Holy Spirit, others as the fire of judgment. The addition "how I wish it were already kindled!" suggests blessing, rather than judgment. The problem is that that which is positive can have a negative effect. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: "There is a sense in which Jesus came to bring peace. But some things are more important than peace, and sometimes his message and the way it is received mean division. Jesus spells this out.

The meaning of this passage is far from obvious. Some take *fire* to mean division, other holiness or faith. But the term more often stands for judgment and that is probably the sense of it here. Jesus' coming means judgment, for example on unbelief. He looks forward to its being *kindled*, i.e. at the cross, the focus of all his activities. Some, it is true, take the words in the sense, 'And what do I want, if it is already kindled?' ... But this is a less likely understanding of the Greek, and of the parallelism with what follows. Jesus is saying that God's plan is for salvation that involves judgment, but a judgment that the Messiah will bear for other, not one he will inflict on others. It is not an attractive prospect, but Jesus longs for it to come, for only so can the saving work be accomplished. He goes on to the thought of the cross as a *baptism*, a figure he uses elsewhere (Mark 10:38f.). It fits in with the frequent link of 'baptism' and 'baptize' with death. We catch a glimpse of the cost of the cross to Jesus in his comment, 'what constraint I am under until the ordeal is over!' (NEB). The shadow of the cross hung over him. He knew it was inevitable: it was the very purpose of his coming (*accomplished = telesthē*, not a fate or an accident, but 'a destiny to be fulfilled ... But though he accepted its inevitability nothing could make it attractive.'

In Matthew's version, Jesus' words are recorded as "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."⁴⁷¹ The emphasis on division is thus made stronger. In that sense, "fire" is the dividing agent, but the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

The description of the division Jesus' ministry will have upon members of a family is a quotation from Micah, which reads: "For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — a man's enemies are the members of his own household." This prophecy is particularly fulfilled in Jewish families where one or more members accept the atonement brought about by Jesus' death on the cross, while the rest of the family sticks to the Old Testament form of worship. It is

⁴⁷¹ Matt. 10:34

also seen in Muslim families where one accepts Christianity. But even in other settings, in which Christianity is part of the culture, an experience of being born again by one family member can upset peace within the household.

14. The signs of the time 12:54-59

54 He said to the crowd: “When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, ‘It’s going to rain,’ and it does.

55 And when the south wind blows, you say, ‘It’s going to be hot,’ and it is.

56 Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time?

57 “Why don’t you judge for yourselves what is right?

58 As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison.

59 I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

A breakdown of the unity of thought seems to occur between vv.57 and 58. What has the weather report in common with financial indebtedness? In our modern day in which whether is predicted by what satellite pictures indicate about cloud formations and prevailing winds, predictions are no longer made by a farmer who sticks a wet finger in the air, but by well-paid professionals.

The people in Jesus’ day were able to predict the weather rather correctly, but they failed to interpret the current events of their day in the light of their knowledge of Old Testament prophecies. That seems to be what Jesus is saying here. We read about the “men of Issachar,” in Old Testament times, that they “understood the times and knew what Israel should do.”⁴⁷²

Jesus, as a human being, had versed Himself in Old Testament prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. Part of His understanding of the role He had come to play in world history came from His human understanding of Old Testament Scriptures. After His resurrection, He referred several times to prophecies about Him that could have given His disciples and the people a clue about what was written about Him. Speaking about His upcoming rejection and death, He said to the Pharisees and teachers of the law: “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”⁴⁷³ To the two who were on their way to Emmaus, He explained what was said in all the Scriptures by Moses and all the Prophets concerning Himself.⁴⁷⁴ And when He met with the disciples, we read: “Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”⁴⁷⁵

At the moment of His arrest He said to His disciples: “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”⁴⁷⁶ The people were familiar with Daniel’s prophecy about the Messiah, which stated: “Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing.”⁴⁷⁷ Those who could predict next day’s weather accurately would have been able to figure out Daniel’s arithmetic and apply it correctly also.

⁴⁷² I Chron. 12:32

⁴⁷³ Matt. 21:42

⁴⁷⁴ Luke 24:27

⁴⁷⁵ Luke 24:45-48

⁴⁷⁶ Matt. 26:53,54

⁴⁷⁷ Dan. 9:25,26

The Hebrew text of the last verse in Daniel’s prophecy reads literally: “And after threescore weeks and two Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself.” The Hebrew word *shishshiyim* means “multiple of ...,” or “sixty.” “Cut off” is the rendering of the Hebrew word *karath*, “to cut,” or “to destroy,” but also “to covenant by making an alliance or bargain, originally by cutting flesh and passing between the pieces.” That was the ceremony God showed Abraham when He made a covenant with him about the possession of the Promised Land. In the vision given to Abraham, God passed alone between the pieces of the cut up animal, vowing that He would be “cut off” if He did not keep His promise.⁴⁷⁸

The symbolic meaning of the last two verses is difficult to understand, both of Jesus’ contemporaries and for us. It must be seen in the context of Jesus’ previous remarks. The topic is guilt or indebtedness. The picture is drawn in terms of a human conflict in which one person is dragged into court for money he owes to someone else. Jesus says, in such situations you try to come to an agreement with the other party before your reach the bench in court. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “Jesus encourages his followers to make their peace with God. In earthly matters people get the best settlement they can out of court instead of insisting on seeing a hopeless case through. Or, in a land like Judea where there were two jurisdictions, the Roman and the Jewish, someone who was likely to be in trouble in one jurisdiction might appeal successfully to the other. But sinners should not be lulled into a sense of false security, thinking that, though their case against God is hopeless, they have a good one in earth’s jurisdictions. If they rely on this they will finally lose everything before the one tribunal that matters, that of God, for ultimately they cannot avoid his jurisdiction. They should spare no effort accordingly to get right with God. When he finally condemns anyone the penalty will be inflicted to the uttermost (*copper = lepton*, the smallest coin in use).”

All this only makes sense if it is put next to a previous remark about the reason for Jesus’ coming to earth. He said in Matthew’s Gospel: “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁴⁷⁹ The above warning concerns those who refuse to accept Jesus intervention in the payment of their debt to God.

Finally, *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on these last two verses: “The lesson, ‘be reconciled to God while it is yet time,’ is, of course, applicable to all lives, precarious and hanging seemingly on a thread as they all are, but it was especially spoken to that generation in view of the awful ruin which he knew was so soon to fall on every Jewish home. The general meaning of the parable illustration was obvious; no hearer could fail to understand the Lord’s meaning. It is before arriving at the judgment-seat that you must be reconciled, with the one who accuses you, otherwise it will be too late, and nothing would remain for the guilty accused but the eternal prison-house. At that moment, when the Master was speaking, individual or nation might have turned to the Lord and lived. There was no time, however, for hesitation. The sands in the hour-glass, which marked the duration of God’s longsuffering with Israel, were just running out. Theologians in different ages and of varied schools have made much of the concluding sentence (ver. 59). Roman Catholic divines see in it a strong argument in favor of the doctrine of purgatory, arguing that after death condemnation would be followed by liberation, when a certain payment had been made by the guilty soul; strange ways of paying this debt by means of others we know have been devised by the school of divines who teach this doctrine of purgatory. But the Lord’s words here are terribly plain, and utterly exclude any payment of the debt of the soul by others. The Master emphatically says, ‘till thou hast paid the very last mite.’ The advocate who pleads for universal redemption, and shrinks from a punishment to the duration of which he can see no term, thinks that in the words, ‘till thou hast paid,’ he can discern the germ at least of eternal hope. But the impenetrable veil which hangs between us and the endless hereafter prevents us, surely, from even suggesting that any suffering which the soul may endure in the unseen world will ever pay ‘the very last mite,’ and so lead to pardon and peace.”

HH. Repentance 13:1-9

1. People who perished 13:1-5

I Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.

⁴⁷⁸ Gen. 15:7-21

⁴⁷⁹ Matt. 20:28

2 Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?

3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them — do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?

5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

This section begins with another news item, something that would have been a hot topic in any modern newscast. Pilate had ordered the execution of some Jews who were bringing their sacrifices in the temple. To the Jews this meant desecration as well as cruel oppression. There had been no arraignments or court cases where people could have defended themselves. These had been gang-style executions.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Such-like incidents were often now occurring under the Roman rule. This, likely enough, had taken place at some crowded Passover gathering, when a detachment of soldiers came down from the Castle of Antonia and had dealt a red-handed ‘justice’ among the turbulent mob. Josephus relates several of the more formidable of such collisions between the Romans and the Jews. At one Passover he relates how three thousand Jews were butchered, and the temple courts were filled with dead corpses; at another of these feasts two thousand perished in like manner ... On another occasion disguised legionaries were sent by Pilate the governor with daggers among the Passover crowds ... These wild and terrible collisions were of frequent occurrence in these sad days.”

Barnes’ Notes comments: “This was doubtless an event of recent occurrence. Jesus, it is probable, had not before heard of it. Why they told him of it can only be a matter of conjecture. It might be from the desire to get him to express an opinion respecting the conduct of Pilate, and thus to involve him in difficulty with the reigning powers of Judea. It might be as a mere matter of news. But, from the answer of Jesus, it would appear that ‘they’ supposed that the Galileans ‘deserved’ it, and that they meant to pass a judgment on the character of those people, a thing of which they were exceedingly fond. The answer of Jesus is a reproof of their habit of hastily judging the character of others.”

It is not clear whether those who reported the incident to Jesus believed that Pilate’s dastardly act had actually been God’s way of punishing the Galileans, or whether they wanted Jesus to comment on it negatively, so that they could report Him to the Roman authorities. If the latter is the case, it would be the same as the trap the Pharisees laid for Jesus when they sent people to ask Him about paying taxes to the Romans.⁴⁸⁰

Jesus did not comment on the legitimacy of Pilate’s act. His answer about the guilt of the Galileans suggests that the people considered the incident to be an expression of God’s wrath upon the individuals who were killed, rather than an instance of Roman repression. The Jews, whose execution had been ordered by Pilate, had probably been involved in acts of subversion against the Romans. The Jews may have contrasted the incident with the one we read about in Daniel, where Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were saved in the fire when they refused to worship King Nebuchadnezzar’s statue.⁴⁸¹ They may have concluded from this that the people who were killed by Pilate had not been righteous like to three Old Testament characters.

Jesus’ answer indicates that God had permitted the Romans to carry out the execution, but not because they had been more sinful than any of the other Jews. What Jesus is saying is that the people who reported the incident to Him ought to ask themselves where they would go if this happened to them. In saying: “Unless you repent, you too will all perish,” the Lord, probably, referred to the future destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews in 70 A.D.

The message of repentance is the one that was initiated by John the Baptist and later continued by Jesus Himself.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸⁰ Matt. 22:17; Mark 12:14; Luke 20:22

⁴⁸¹ Dan. 3:1-30

⁴⁸² Matt. 3:2; 4:17

Barnes' Notes observes: "It is improper to suppose that those on whom heavy judgments fall in this world are the worst of people. This is not a world of retribution. Often the most wicked are suffered to prosper here, and their punishment is reserved for another world; while the righteous are called to suffer much, and 'appear' to be under the sore displeasure of God, Ps 73. This only we know, that the wicked will not always escape; that God is just; and that none who do suffer here or hereafter, suffer more than they deserve. In the future world, all that seems to be unequal here will be made equal and plain."

2. The man seeking fruit 13:6-9

6 *Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.*

7 *So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'*

8 *"'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it.*

9 *If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"*

In introducing this passage, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: "The preceding passage has stressed the importance of repenting and this one highlights the fact that opportunity does not last for ever." The image of the unproductive tree was also one used by John the Baptist, who had said: "The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."⁴⁸³ We could say that the fig tree was Israel's national tree. It represented the nation as a whole.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the fact that, in Jesus' parable, a fig tree was planted in a vineyard. We read: "It is not an uncommon practice to plant fig trees at the corners of vineyards, thus utilizing every available spot of ground. Still the Lord's choice of a fig tree as the symbol of Israel, the chosen people, is at first sight strange. This image was no doubt selected to show those Pharisees and other Jews, proud of what they considered their unassailable position as the elect of the Eternal, that, after all, the position they occupied was but that of a fig tree in the corner of the vineyard of the world — planted there and watched over so long as it promised to serve the Lord of the vineyard's purpose; if it ceased to do that, if it gave no further promise of fruit, then it would be ruthlessly cut down."

Israel had been God's tree, planted in this world for the purpose of bearing fruit. This was expressed in the original blessing God had given to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."⁴⁸⁴ God wanted Israel to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."⁴⁸⁵ As priests, they were to be the bridge between heaven and earth; representing God to this world and this world to God. That was the foremost reason for which God had entrusted the revelation of Himself to them. Their failure to produce fruit consisted in the fact that they did not demonstrate God's revelation to the world in lives of daily holiness. They believed that God had chosen them because they were special; not that they were special because God had chosen them.

In another parable, Jesus would show the people of His day that God might take away from them their special calling, the vineyard, and give it to other nations of the world.⁴⁸⁶ In the parable told here, Jesus is the man taking care of the vineyard, who interceded in behalf of the nation. But, as we read in John's Gospel: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."⁴⁸⁷

II. Healing a bent woman 13:10-17

10 *On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues,*

11 *and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all.*

⁴⁸³ Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9

⁴⁸⁴ Gen. 12:3

⁴⁸⁵ Ex. 19:6

⁴⁸⁶ Luke 20:9-16

⁴⁸⁷ John 1:11

12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.”

13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”

15 The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?”

16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

There is no indication where or when this miracle of healing took place. This is also the only instance we read about when Jesus taught in a synagogue on His way to Jerusalem for His last journey. Luke, the physician, makes clear that the woman’s problem was not merely physical. It was a demonic spirit that had kept her bent over.

We are not told whether this woman had faith or not. Jesus takes the initiative in this healing. His reason for doing so was, obviously, not only to free the woman, but to prove a point about the meaning of the Sabbath. One of the unusual features of this healing is the fact that Jesus spoke to the woman, declaring her to be healed, and then laid hands on her. We do not read that Jesus addressed the demon and thus exorcised her, but, evidently, that was what happened.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “Afraid, before the congregation of the synagogue, to attack the Master personally, the ‘ruler,’ no doubt influenced by members of the Pharisee party who were present, attempted to represent the great Physician as a deliberate scorner of the sacred Law. The sabbath regulations at this time were excessively burdensome and childishly rigorous. The Law, as expounded in the schools of the rabbis, allowed physicians to act in cases of emergency, but not in chronic diseases such as this.”

It is interesting to observe that the synagogue ruler did not address Jesus, but the congregation, telling them that it was a sin for them to come and be healed on the Sabbath, as if that constituted “work.” It was only Jesus who worked, not the woman. There may be a special intended insult in the fact that the ruler did not address Jesus personally, as if He was known to be an incorrigible Sabbath offender. In answering, Jesus, in turn does not address the ruler personally either. The word “hypocrites” is plural, indicating that this man was a member of a whole group of hypocritical people who corrupted the Sabbath concept.

Originally, the Sabbath was a commemoration of creation. We read: “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”

The Sabbath was incorporated in the Decalogue as a commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”⁴⁸⁸

Yet, after sin entered God’s creation, the Father broke the Sabbath Himself. We read in John’s Gospel that Jesus answered His accusers: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”⁴⁸⁹ The Sabbath, from a day of rest, became a day of restoration. Jesus indicates that the Sabbath was particularly suited for healings, such as these.

⁴⁸⁸ Ex. 20:8-11

⁴⁸⁹ John 5:17

In His answer, Jesus, again, uses the example of domestic animals that are untied, taken out of their stalls, and led to be watered. Jesus had used the same image at the healing of the man with the withered hand. We read that, at that time, the Pharisees had asked Jesus: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” And Jesus had answered: “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”⁴⁹⁰

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states: “The ruler of the synagogue knew the statute; the Lord knew how to apply the exception. Why should not this woman have relief from suffering on the Sabbath, if the Law provided for the prevention of thirst for animals? Jesus went further than to suggest that the healing was allowable; he asserted that it was obligatory.”

One of the most interesting features in the present story is the fact that Jesus calls the woman “a daughter of Abraham.” The fact that she was Abraham’s daughter gave her the right to be healed. It gave her the right to be free from satanic interference in her life. Jesus would use the same terminology at the salvation of Zacchaeus, saying: “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.”⁴⁹¹

The Apostle Paul extends the concept of being Abraham’s daughter or son to all believers in Jesus Christ, saying: “Consider Abraham: ‘He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”⁴⁹²

The NIV states that Jesus’ opponents were “humiliated.” The Greek word used is *kataischuno*, which actually means “to put to shame,” or “to confound.”

JJ. The kingdom of God 13:18-30

1. The mustard seed 13:18-19

18 Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?”

19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states: “The two short parables that begin this section form a pair also in Matthew (that of the mustard seed, but not the leaven, occurs in Mark).

Luke’s therefore shows that this teaching arises out of the preceding. The opposition of the ruler of the synagogue and his friends did not mean that the kingdom would fail of its consummation. The warm welcome the multitude gave Jesus’ retort to the ruler and their joy in all his works (17) showed that the kingdom was making its impact ... This kind of pithy story might easily be repeated and used in different ways. In fact, in Matthew and Mark the contrast between the tiny size of the mustard seed and the big plant that results is the point. Luke, however, does not even mention the size of the seed. Here the point is the end result: the plant grows so big that the birds nest in its branches ... The kingdom will be universal. People from all nations will find themselves therein.”

Bible scholars have been challenged in their efforts to interpret these two short parables and at least two schools have developed, each with its own interpretation that challenges the other. Matthew places both short parables in a group of longer ones. In our commentary on Matthew, we wrote: “Those who interpret these parables with the suggestion that the Lord wants to illustrate how well the Kingdom is doing with the stories of a miraculous growth of a seed and the workings of yeast, lose sight of the context in which Matthew places these stories. On the other hand, the interpretation of the growing of the mustard seed, as representing the unnatural growth of the Kingdom, of that which God intended to be a modest organism,

⁴⁹⁰ Matt. 12:11,12

⁴⁹¹ Luke 19:9

⁴⁹² Gal. 3:6-9

into a monster conglomerate, does not seem to fit the picture either. After all, if the mustard seed grows up to be a tree, it obeys the law God embedded into mustard seeds. It has been suggested that the birds that perch in the branches are the same birds that ate up the seed in the Parable of the Sower. But if we start borrowing images from different parables in order to find meaning, we could as well say that the mustard seed in this story is the same as the one that represents faith that moves mountains.”

2. The Yeast 13:20-21

“If the picture of the bird is less convincing, the meaning of yeast seems to be abundantly clear. Yeast, in Jesus’ days was spoiled dough. In several instances in the Bible, it is used as an image of sin. The Passover was followed by the weeklong celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. At the inauguration of the feast, God said to Moses: ‘Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is an alien or native-born. Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread.’⁴⁹³ The Apostle Paul spiritualizes it in an even more convincing way when he writes to the Corinthians: ‘Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.’⁴⁹⁴ And yeast was generally excluded from the offerings brought to the Lord. We read in Leviticus: ‘Every grain offering you bring to the LORD must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering made to the LORD by fire.’ The only exception was the offering brought at Pentecost, at which occasion yeast could be used. We read: ‘From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD.’⁴⁹⁵

Although yeast represents corrupted substance, it serves an important purpose. It makes bread light and tasty. The disgusting feature of yeast is naturalized in the fire when the bread is baked. This may be the most important lesson in these two parables. Evil does not corrupt the Kingdom of Heaven. In the growth of the Kingdom, evil even plays an important role and fulfills a function for good. These parables provide us with no explanation of the existence of evil but they indicate how God can use that which is bad for the building up of life, and how God can even turn a curse around and make it into a blessing. We find this truth illustrated all through the Bible. Every child of God experiences some of this in his or her personal life. Persecution, sorrow, and even death tend to strengthen our fellowship with God. ‘We know that all things work together for good to those who love God.’⁴⁹⁶ These parables indicate that this principle is working all through the history of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

It could be that Jesus’ use of the same parable in different context requires a different interpretation. Jesus’ teaching was not always devoid of irony. The healing of a woman’s back problem does not seem to be a very clear instance of the proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven. Yet, when John the Baptists sent his disciples to Jesus with the question “‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’ Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.’”⁴⁹⁷ The beginning of the Kingdom did look insignificant. It began with one itinerant rabbi who prepared twelve disciples with the message that would turn the world upside down.

3. Who are in the kingdom? 13:22-30

22 Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.

23 Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” He said to them,

⁴⁹³ Ex. 12:17-20

⁴⁹⁴ I Cor. 5:7,8

⁴⁹⁵ Lev. 23:17

⁴⁹⁶ Rom. 8:28 (NKJV)

⁴⁹⁷ Matt. 11:3-5

24 “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

25 Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ “But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’

26 “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’

27 “But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’

28 “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.

29 People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

30 Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “The impression Luke conveys is that Jesus journeyed on towards Jerusalem (he emphasizes the destination) without haste, and with many pauses for teaching in both large towns and small villages. Somewhere someone asked, *Lord, will those who are saved be few?* The question was very relevant in view of the confused religious state of the day. There is evidence that it was widely discussed ... and that the rabbis held widely differing views ... But it seems to have been firmly held that all Israel would be saved, except for a few blatant sinners who excluded themselves.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments helpfully on the views of salvation prevailing at that time in Israel. We read: “The immediate circumstance which called out this question is not recorded, but the general tone of the Master’s later teaching, especially on the subject of his kingdom of the future, had disturbed the vision of many in Israel, who loved to dwell on the exclusion of all save the chosen race from the glories of the world to come. The words of the Second Book of Esdras, written perhaps forty or fifty years after this time, well reflect this selfish spirit of harsh exclusiveness, peculiarly a characteristic of the Jew in the days of our Lord. ‘The Most High hath made this world for many, but the world to come for few’ (2 Esdr. 8:1). ‘There be many more of them which perish, than of them which shall be saved: like as a wave is greater than a drop’ (2 Esdr. 9:15, 16). Other passages breathing a similar spirit might be quoted. What relics we possess of Jewish literature of this period all reflect the same stern, jealous, exclusive spirit. The questioner here either hoped to get from the popular Master some statement which might be construed into an approval of this national spirit of hatred of everything that was not Jewish, or, if Jesus chose to combat these selfish hopes, the Master’s words might then be quoted to the people as unpatriotic.”

The concept of salvation is not defined in this story. As *The Pulpit Commentary*’s comment suggests, the question probably pertained to entering heaven at the end of life on earth. Jesus had defined salvation as an experience occurring in this world during life on earth. We read: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”⁴⁹⁸ But that is not the answer Jesus gives here to the inquirer.

Actually, Jesus does not answer at all the question about whether many or few will be saved. He tells the questioner to be sure he himself will qualify. He does not mention either what the requirements for salvation are.

In *The Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus had compared salvation to entering a small gate and traveling on a narrow path.⁴⁹⁹ He uses part of the same image here, but the gate becomes the entrance to a person’s home. In *The Sermon on the Mount*, we also read about those who knock on heaven’s door and find it closed.⁵⁰⁰ Luke renders the knockers plea with: “We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.” In Matthew, the people who knock on the door say: “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?”⁵⁰¹ This suggests that Jesus used the same parable at different occasions. Prophesying and casting out demons refers to ministry; eating and drinking

⁴⁹⁸ John 5:24

⁴⁹⁹ Matt. 7:13,14

⁵⁰⁰ Matt. 7:21-23

⁵⁰¹ Matt. 7:22

together speaks of fellowship. But, evidently, those people’s ministry had been performed without divine call and their fellowship had lacked surrender.

Those who do not surrender control of their lives to God during their life on earth will find themselves in hell, excluded from fellowship with God and all the Old Testament saints. The sight of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in heaven, together with all Old Testament prophets, but themselves being excluded, answers the concept that all of Israel would be saved. We find in Jesus’ words the same truth as expressed in the parable of the vineyard,⁵⁰² where the conclusion is that Israel’s mandate could be entrusted to other people who had not been part of God’s covenant.

The Pulpit Commentary states about Jesus’ description of hell as the place of agony: “No less than six times is this terrible formula, which expresses the intensest form of anguish, found in St. Matthew’s Gospel. St. Luke only gives us the account of one occasion on which they were spoken. They indicate, as far as merely earthly words and symbols can, the utter misery of those unhappy ones who find themselves shut out from the kingdom in the world to come.”

As we mentioned before, it had been God’s plan for Israel to be His priests in this world. They had been given God’s revelation as a mandate to evangelize the whole world. But instead of reaching the world, they had hidden and hoarded the talent that had been entrusted to them. But in Jesus’ vision, people from all over the world would come and enter the kingdom, while those who had received the mandate were left outside. Paul’s motto was “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”⁵⁰³ But in Paul’s ministry also the Gentiles would enter ahead of the Jews. The last would become first and the first last.

KK. Prophets perish in Jerusalem 13:31-35

1. That fox Herod 13:31-33

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

32 *He replied, “Go tell that fox, ‘I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’*

33 *In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day — for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes about these verses: “It is curious to find *some Pharisees* warning Jesus against Herod. Though they were vigorously opposed to much that he said and did, they may have recognized that they stood a good deal closer to him than they did to Herod. It is perhaps more likely that they were Herod’s witting or unwitting agents. After his experience with John the Baptist the tetrarch may not have wanted the murder of another prophet on his conscience; but he did want to be rid of Jesus. So he used the Pharisees to pass on a death threat. They may have been ready to cooperate in the hope of frightening Jesus into moving out of Perea into Judea, where they had more power.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “This incident connected with Herod Antipas, which is only related by St. Luke, not improbably was communicated to Luke and Paul by Manaen, who was intimately connected with that prince, and who was a prominent member of the primitive Church of Antioch in those days when Paul was beginning his work for the cause (see ... Acts 13:1). This curious message probably emanated from Herod and Herodias. The tetrarch was disturbed and uneasy at the Lord’s continued presence in his dominions, and the crowds who thronged to hear the great Teacher occasioned the jealous and timorous prince grave disquietude. Herod shrank from laying hands on him, though, for the memory of the murdered friend of Jesus was a terrible one, we know, to the superstitious tetrarch, and he dreaded being forced into a repetition of the judicial murder of John the Baptist. It is likely enough that the enemies of the Lord were now anxious for him to go to Jerusalem and its neighbourhood, where he would be in the power of the Sadducean hierarchy, and away from the protection of the Galilaean multitudes, with whom his influence was still very great. The Pharisees, who as a party hated the Master, willingly entered into the design, and under the mask of a pretended friendship warned him of Herod’s intentions.”

⁵⁰² Matt. 21:33-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-16

⁵⁰³ Rom. 1:16

The Fausset's Bible Dictionary comments on Jesus calling Herod “that fox”: “The Lord had withdrawn from His plotting foes in Judea to the retired region beyond Jordan, Peraea. The Pharisees came to expedite His departure by pretending ‘Herod was seeking to kill Him.’ Herod was wishing Him to depart, feeling embarrassed how to treat Him whether to honor or persecute Him (Luke 9:7-9; 13:32). It was the Pharisees themselves who wished to kill Him. But Herod lent himself to their design and so played the ‘fox.’ Tell that fox that ‘today and tomorrow’ I remain doing works of mercy in the borders of his province, ‘on the third day’ I begin that journey which ends in My about to be consummated sacrifice.”

It seems doubtful, as the above comments suggest, that Herod really wanted Jesus to be killed. On the day of Jesus’ crucifixion, when Herod met Jesus, we read that the king hoped to see Him perform a miracle. Being disappointed in that wish, however, he switched to mockery.⁵⁰⁴

A lot can be said about Jesus’ comparing King Herod to a fox. The fact that a fox is considered crafty, suggests possession of animal intelligence. In this comparison, the emphasis is more upon craftiness than intelligence. Jesus certainly did not use the expression as a compliment. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: “The fox was used by the Jews a symbol of a sly man, but more often for an insignificant or worthless one ... It was sometimes a symbol of destructiveness. [One scholar observes] ‘To call Herod “that fox” is as much as to say that he is neither a great man nor a straight man; he has neither majesty nor honor.’” The expression is thus contemptuous. Herod is the only person Jesus is recorded as having treated with contempt.”

Jesus’ message to King Herod reveals the purpose of His life. He had “not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁵⁰⁵ He was on His way to Jerusalem. The goal of Jesus’ life was His atoning death for the sins of mankind. The fact that this would include Herod’s sins also makes this answer to the king a positive expression of God’s grace. That, however, would be completely wasted on Herod.

There is in Jesus’ words the same determination Luke described in an earlier chapter. We read: “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”⁵⁰⁶ There is also a touch of divine irony in the words: “Surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!” This is followed by the heartrending outburst: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” How deeply emotional Jesus felt is clear from a later statement in Luke, where we read: “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it.”⁵⁰⁷

2. Lament over Jerusalem

13:34-35

34 *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”*

35 *Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”*

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Jesus’ words: “This exquisite and moving apostrophe was uttered in similar language in the Passion-week, just as Jesus was leaving the temple for the last time. It was spoken here with rare appropriateness in the first instance after the promise of sad irony that the holy city should not be deprived of the spectacle of the Teacher-Prophet’s death. ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!’ It was a farewell to the holy city. It was the sorrowful summing-up of the tenderest love of centuries. Never had earthly city been loved like this. There the anointed of the Eternal were to fix their home. There the stately shrine for the service of the invisible King of Israel was to keep watch and ward over the favored capital of the chosen race. There the visible presence of the Lord God Almighty, the Glory and the Pride of the people, was ever and anon to rest. And in this solemn last farewell, the Master looked back through the vista of the past ages of Jerusalem’s history, it was a dark and gloomy contemplation. It had been all along

⁵⁰⁴ See Luke 23:8-11

⁵⁰⁵ Matt. 20:28

⁵⁰⁶ Luke 9:51

⁵⁰⁷ Luke 19:41

the wicked chief city of a wicked people, of a people who had thrown away the fairest chances ever offered to men — the city of a people whose annals were memorable for deeds of blood, for the most striking ingratitude, for incapacity, for folly shading into crime. Not once nor twice in that dark story of Israel chosen messengers of the invisible King had visited the city he loved so well. These were invested with the

high credentials which belong to envoys from the King of kings, with a voice sweeter and more persuasive, with a power grander and more far-reaching than were the common heritage of men; and these envoys, his prophets, they had maltreated, persecuted, murdered.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “The tender address shows that Jesus was deeply concerned about the final fate of the city. It shows also that he must have had more dealing with Jerusalem than are recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, for *How often* would be a curious way of referring to the few contacts with the city of which they speak. Jesus describes Jerusalem as habitually rejecting, even killing God’s messengers, be they prophets or others (cf. 2 Kgs 21:16; 2 Chr. 24:21; Jer. 26:20f., etc.). Yet even so she was not rejected out of hand. The Son of God would often have *gathered her children together*, but they would not come (for contrasting attitude cf. Ps. 57:1). There is a tenderness in the imagery of the hen and its chicks. The responsibility of the Jews for their fate is sheeted home with the final *you would not!*”

The nation has invited the final result. When a nation or an individual persists in rejecting God the end is inevitable. So Jesus says *your house is forsaken*. Many hold the *house* to be the temple, but it is more probably Jerusalem as a whole. Whatever the truth of this, the important thing is that it is *forsaken* (cf. Jer. 22:1). God no longer lives there: that is the final disaster. Jesus goes on to say that the city will see him no more until it greets him in the words of Psalm 118:26. Some see in this a reference to the triumphal entry when these words were used about Jesus. But this seems an inadequate fulfillment of such a solemn prediction. And in any case it was not the people of the city but the Galilean pilgrims who uttered the words then. Moreover Matthew records Jesus’ prediction after the entry (Matt. 23:39; the entry is in Matt. 21:1-11). Others think of the words as the response of believing Jews at some future conversion of Jerusalem, but it is hard to see this either in the words themselves or in history. It is better to think of the second advent. Jesus’ return in splendor will draw from Jerusalem this recognition, however unwilling, of his Messiahship.”

The repetition Jerusalem, Jerusalem expresses the deep love and emotions Jesus felt toward the people who inhabited Israel’s capital city. Matthew records Jesus’ last visit to the temple and His leaving the building.⁵⁰⁸ The glory of the Lord left the house of the Lord. It was, in a way, the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s vision in which the prophet saw the glory of the Lord leaving the temple.⁵⁰⁹ At that moment, the temple King Solomon had built became a dead body, left to decomposition.

The only part left now of that edifice is the first few rows of stone of Jerusalem’s Wailing Wall. According to present-day Jews, who say their prayers at that place, God is still present between the cracks of the stones. They evidently ignore the Old Testament reports.

As far as Morris’ comment is concerned on the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy about His triumphant return, we believe that prophecy can be fulfilled on different occasions. Jesus’ entry into the city on Palm Sunday surely was a partly fulfilling of these words. Jesus also entered the temple and the city on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles and the church was born. The final fulfillment will take place on the last day of world history, when He returns and “all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him,” including those who pierced Him.⁵¹⁰

LL. Dinner with a Pharisee 14:1-24

1. Healing of a man with dropsy 14:1-6

1 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.

2 There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy.

⁵⁰⁸ Matt. 24:1

⁵⁰⁹ Ezek. 8-11

⁵¹⁰ Rev. 1:7

3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”

4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.

5 Then he asked them, “If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?”

6 And they had nothing to say.

The Pharisee who invited Jesus for dinner is called “a prominent Pharisee.” The Greek word used is *archon*, meaning “first in rank.” Luke uses the same word for “Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue.”⁵¹¹ This Pharisee may have been the main rabbi of the place. Luke does not tell us where this happened, but obviously it occurred during Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem.

It seems that the main reason for the invitation was not to have Jesus as an honored guest, but to see if He could be caught doing something illegal on the Sabbath. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The feast and its attendant circumstances were all arranged, and Jesus’ watchful enemies waited to see what he would do.” This could mean that even the man who was suffering from dropsy had been brought in on purpose.

The Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary describes “dropsy” as “an abnormal accumulation of serous fluid in the body’s connective tissue or in a serous cavity. The accumulation causes swelling.” The Greek word *hudropikos* (dropsy) only occurs in Luke’s Gospel at this place.

Jesus sees through the setup and He initiates the conversation by asking the question “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” The same question had been asked before in connection with the healing of a man with a withered hand.⁵¹² The question is answered by a complete silence. In some cultures silence in answer to a question means agreement, but in others it means disagreement. The latter was obviously the case in Jewish culture.

After performing the healing Jesus asks the same question He had asked in connection with the healing of the man with the withered hand, using the illustration of a son or an animal falling in a well on the Sabbath. Again, the question is met with silence. The NIV’s “They had nothing to say” is the rendering of the Greek: “And they could not answer [Him] again to these things.” As in the case of the healing of the woman who could not stand up straight,⁵¹³ Jesus seems to say that the Sabbath was particularly suited for healing. It was the day of restoration “par excellence!”

2. Invitation to a banquet 14:7-14

7 When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable:

8 “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.

9 If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.

10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests.

11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

12 Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.

13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,

14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

⁵¹¹ Luke 8:41

⁵¹² Matt. 12:10; Luke 6:9

⁵¹³ Luke 13:10-17

The place is the same as in the previous section. Evidently, the healing of the man with dropsy occurred before the guest had taken their places at the table. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, explains about seating arrangements: “At banquets the basic item of furniture was the couch for three, the *triclinium*. A number of *triclinia* were arranged in a U shape round a low table. Guests reclined on their left elbows. The place of highest honor was the central position on the couch at the base of the U. The second and third places were those on the left of the principal man (i.e. reclining behind him) and on his right (i.e. reclining with the head on his bosom). After this there seems to have ranked the couch to the left (with the places as on the first couch), then that to the right of the first and so on.”

Jesus must have looked on with an ironic eye as the guests were elbowing their way to the first places in the room. There were seats of honor some felt that they had to right to occupy. Their claim to honor rested upon their level of education. They despised anyone without education, saying “This mob that knows nothing of the law — there is a curse on them.”⁵¹⁴ But even among themselves there was strife and rivalry. There was a certain pecking order they were forced to submit to but which they tried to undercut.

The problem was that these people compared themselves to other people and thus set their own standards. If we compare ourselves with God, we will end up getting a clear picture of our own importance and unimportance. We are created in His image, which may give us claim to the highest honor, and we fall short of the glory of God, which makes us of all man most miserable. Since we will all ultimately be judged by God and be measured by the standards of His holiness, we will be wise if we use God’s holiness as the measuring stick for our acts and attitudes. The law requires that we use God’s standard as the standard of our life. We read in Leviticus that God says: “be holy, because I am holy.”⁵¹⁵ At one point God said: “Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the Lord, who makes you holy.”⁵¹⁶ Holiness is not only a requirement; it is a possibility for the person who was obedient to the law.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “The expositors of the Law of God, the religious guides of the people, were setting an example of self-seeking, were showing what was their estimate of a fitting reward, what was the crown of learning which they coveted — the first seats at a banquet, the title of respect and honour! How the Lord — the very essence of whose teaching was self-surrender and self-sacrifice — must have mourned over such pitiful exhibitions of weakness shown by the men who claimed to sit in Moses’ seat!”

At one point Jesus said to the same kind of self-seeking people: “How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”⁵¹⁷

There may be a point in the fact that Jesus uses a wedding banquet as a model in His parable. The meal to which He had been invited was no celebration; it was a pre-arranged event for the purpose of observing Jesus and eventually catching Him.

The people that joined Jesus at this particular meal considered themselves important. Each one thought he was the most important individual in the group. No one is completely except from this kind of deceptive mentality. When we look at a group picture, for instance, the first face we will look for is our own.

The point of Jesus’ parable is that our pride can lead to embarrassment. If we try to draw the attention of others to ourselves by choosing the first place, we may succeed by catching everybody’s eye when we are asked to move down.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “The principle that should govern our conduct occurs a number of times in slightly different forms (18:14; Matt. 23:12; cf. Matt. 18:4; 1 Pet. 5:6). To exalt oneself means ultimate abasement. The way to true exaltation is humility.

Jesus has some advice for the host: he should not confine his guest-list to friends, relations and rich neighbors. If these are the only objects of his bounty he will suffer the terrible fare of receiving return invitations! In this way he will *be repaid*. It scarcely needs pointing out that Jesus is not forbidding normal

⁵¹⁴ John 7:49

⁵¹⁵ Lev. 11:44,45; 19:2

⁵¹⁶ Lev. 20:7,8

⁵¹⁷ John 5:44

social life. But he is emphasizing that there is no generosity in giving to people who will make recompense.”

We may not receive any recompense from the side of our fellowmen if we humble ourselves. The exaltation Jesus speaks about is God’s compensation for humility. This is a theme found repeatedly in the Scriptures. James writes: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”⁵¹⁸ And Peter states: “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”⁵¹⁹

Humility will show itself in the way we look at other people. These Pharisees and doctors of the law made it a point to only brush shoulders with people in their own cast. They not only despised the masses that had not studied the law, but also the large section of population that, nowadays would be called “underprivileged”: the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. At other places Jesus shows that He comes to us, particularly in the disguise of those people. We read in another of Jesus’ parables: “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”⁵²⁰ And: “And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”⁵²¹

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary remarks about the phrase “the resurrection of the righteous”: “The language used here supports the idea of a double resurrection, one of the righteous, and one of the wicked (cf. John 5:29; 1 Cor 15:23; Phil 3:11; 1 Thess 4:16; Heb 11:35; Rev 20:5-6), separated by an interval of time.”

3. Excuses 14:15-24

15 *When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”*

16 *Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.*

17 *At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’*

18 *“But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’*

19 *“Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’*

20 *“Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’*

21 *“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’*

22 *““Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’*

23 *“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.*

⁵¹⁸ James 4:6

⁵¹⁹ I Peter 5:5

⁵²⁰ Matt. 25:34-40

⁵²¹ Matt. 10:42

24 I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.”

Jesus’ parable is in answer to an ejaculation of one of the guests who exclaimed: “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” Bible scholars have argued about whether this man was sincere or merely pious. It is difficult to determine from the point in Jesus’ parable whether Jesus considered him to be among those making excuses upon receiving the invitation.

It is obvious that the one who prepared the great banquet and invited many guests is God. The banquet would later be called in Scripture “the wedding supper of the Lamb!”⁵²²

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes about the invitation: “In an age when people had no watches and time was fairly elastic, and when a banquet took a long time to prepare, the precaution must have been helpful to all. We see the double invitation in the Old Testament (Esth. 5:8: 6:14), while a remark in the Midrash on Lamentations shows that much later the men of Jerusalem took it very seriously: ‘None of them would attend a banquet unless he was invited twice’ (on Lam. 4:2).”

The Pulpit Commentary calls the excuses given by those who had been invited to the banquet “paltry.” Quoting an outside source, the commentary states: “The Jews were ‘solemn triflers in the matter of religion. They were under invitation to enter the kingdom, and they did not assume the attitude of men who avowedly cared nothing for it. On the contrary, they were pleased to think that its privileges were theirs in offer, and even gave themselves credit for setting a high value on them. But in truth they did not. The kingdom of God had not by any means the first place in their esteem. They were men who talked much about the kingdom of heaven, yet cared little for it; who were very religious, yet very worldly — a class of which too many specimens exist in every age.”

The excuses given would not hold any water in any society. Who would buy a field sight unseen? And who would buy oxen to plough his fields without making sure that they were good for the job he bought them for? Even worse, who would marry a wife without knowing who she was? The fact that this had happened to Jacob in ages gone by would be enough of a warning against such mistakes.⁵²³

There is a similar story in Matthew’s Gospel,⁵²⁴ in which the general theme is the same, but the details are different. Evidently, Jesus used the parable more than once. Matthew’s version illustrates the anger of the lord of the house, whom he calls “the king” in a more dramatic manner. The king’s servants are mistreated and even murdered and the king retaliates by sending his army to destroy the cities where this happened. Such extremes details are missing in Luke’s version.

The ones who ultimately participate in the banquet are “the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.” In Jewish society they were the outcasts who were forced to make their living by begging on the roadside. In a spiritual sense they describe man’s lost condition. The Gospel is meant for those who know that they are spiritually poor, crippled, blind or lame, or even worse, to use Paul’s terminology, “dead in transgressions and sins.”⁵²⁵

Even after all the outcasts have been brought in there was space for more. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: “While these words are necessary to complete the picture, still in them we have a hint of the vast size of the kingdom of God. The realms of the blessed are practically boundless. Here, again, in the first instance, there was a Jewish instruction intended to correct the false current notion that that kingdom was narrow in extent, and intended to be confined to the chosen race of Israel. It is very different in the Lord’s picture.”

At the conclusion of this story, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states: “The parable concludes with a somber verdict on those who were first invited and who made their excuses. There would be no second chance for them. They had squandered their opportunity and would get no other. Once again we see Jesus pressing the urgency of the situation. God is gracious and will receive all who come to him, but people may not dilly-dally. Those first invited might not take up the invitation, but others would, both Jew and Gentile. God’s purpose may be resisted, but it cannot be overthrown.”

⁵²² Rev. 19:9

⁵²³ Gen 29:22-25

⁵²⁴ Matt. 22:1-10

⁵²⁵ Eph. 2:1

MM. Discipleship 14:25-35

1. The cost of discipleship 14:25-33

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:

26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple.

27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

28 “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?

29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him,

30 saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

31 “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?

32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about the “hatred” Jesus preached: “There is no place in Jesus’ teaching for literal hatred. He commanded his follower to love even their enemies (6:27), so it is impossible to hold that he is here telling them literally to hate their earthly nearest (cf. 8:20f). But hating can mean something like loving less (Gen. 29:31, 33; Deut. 21:15, where the Hebrew means ‘hated’ and not ‘disliked,’ as RSV). Jesus’ meaning is surely that the love the disciple has for him must be so great that the best of earthly loves is hatred by comparison (cf. Matt. 10:17). The listing of the nearest and dearest spells this out with solemnity. A person must not set store even by his own life (cf. John 12:25). Devotion to Christ cannot be less than whole-hearted.” Elsewhere in Luke’s Gospel Jesus said to the man who wanted to say goodbye to his family before following Christ: “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”⁵²⁶ Christ call upon our life must be the overriding element that puts all else in oblivion.

Discipleship must also be calculated. It cannot be based upon mere emotional impulse. That does not mean that there is no emotional involvement in following Christ. Love cannot exist without emotions, but it begins with a decision of the will. We can only “love the Lord your God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength,”⁵²⁷ if we obey the commandment.

Jesus uses two parables to illustrate His point: one about a man who builds a tower without first figuring out how much money he needs to complete the project and one about a king who plans a war without first making sure he has the army large enough to win. There is a paradox in both stories if we consider the spiritual lesson intended. The project to be built and the war to be fought both relate to the kingdom of God. That kingdom is God’s project, not ours. We do not plan it or pay for it. God paid for it the highest price ever paid in the universe: the death of His own Son. That is why Jesus uses the image of a man who is going to be crucified and who goes to the place of execution, carrying the crossbeam of his own means of execution.

Following Jesus Christ means emptying ourselves in the same way as Christ, who, “being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.”⁵²⁸ The Son of God laid aside His divine attributes; we lay aside that which is not worth hanging on to.

⁵²⁶ Luke 9:62

⁵²⁷ Deut. 6:5

⁵²⁸ Phil. 2:6,7

If a person was condemned to death by crucifixion, carrying his cross was not a matter of choice. In following Jesus, we volunteer to carry our cross after Him. Simon of Cyrene carried Jesus' cross,⁵²⁹ not by choice but because Roman soldiers forced him to do so. We can only carry the cross if we understand that we forfeited our right to live because of our sinful condition. Taking up our cross means that we agree with God's verdict upon our lives. We have no money to build the tower and we have no army to fight the war. Taking up our cross means applying for bankruptcy.

2. Salt 14:34-35

34 *"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?"*

35 *It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about this short parable: "It is, of course, impossible for salt (sodium chloride) to lose its taste, but the salt in use in first-century Palestine was far from pure. It was quite possible for the sodium chloride to be leached out of the impure salt in common use so that what was left lacked the taste of salt. It was literally useless. It could not fertilize the land or even decompose usefully on the manure heap. *Men throw it away*. There is an astringent quality about discipleship. If anyone lack it, then whatever other qualities he may have, as regards discipleship he is useless."

Jesus had used the image of salt for those who followed Him in *The Sermon on the Mount*.⁵³⁰ In the context in which we find it in Luke's Gospel, salt stands for the life that is surrendered to God's will. Giving up ourselves completely, recognizing our bankruptcy before God, will make us "the salt of the earth," the agent that will keep corruption at a distance. Without the life of Christ within us our lives will be completely useless. Jesus ends this observation by saying: "Did you hear what I said?"

NN. Three parables of the lost 15:1-32

In introducing this chapter, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states: "This is one of the best-known and best-loved chapter in the whole Bible. Three parables bring out the joy of God when the lost sinner is found. The fact that the first two depict people who actively seek what is lost may well put emphasis on the truth that God does not wait passively for sinners to come to him, but actively seeks them out."

1. The sinners gather 15:1-2

1 *Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him.*

2 *But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*

We owe the three priceless parables in this chapter to the fact that the Pharisees and teachers of the law criticized Jesus for associating with tax collectors and sinners. The Greek verb used for "mutter" is *diagogguzo*, which literally means "to go around murmuring." In English, "to murmur" usually means to complain in a low voice, not something that is shouted from the rooftops. The picture we get is that of Pharisees going around Jesus' audience and whispering that Jesus' message is undercut by His association with the wrong crowd.

It is an interesting fact that tax collectors and sinner were particularly drawn to Jesus. His message must have given them not only a measure of conviction of sin, but also of God's love and forgiveness.

It is difficult for us to appreciate the tension in Jesus' time caused by the fact that there were some Israelites who made a living by cooperating with the Roman government that had conquered Israel and robbed its people of their independence. Having lived under Nazi occupation in the Netherlands during the Second World War, I remember the hatred most Dutchmen felt against those who collaborated with the oppressors.

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary states about the tax collectors: "As a class, the tax collectors were despised by their fellow Jews. They were classified generally as 'sinners' (Matt 9:10-11; Mark 2:15),

⁵²⁹ Matt. 27:32

⁵³⁰ Matt. 5:13

probably because they were allowed to gather more than the government required and then to pocket the excess amount. John the Baptist addressed this when he urged tax collectors to gather no more money than they should (Luke 3:12-13). But even further, the tax collectors were hated because their fellow countrymen viewed them as mercenaries who worked for a foreign oppressor of the Jewish people.

Jesus, however, set a new precedent among the Jews by accepting and associating with the tax collectors. He ate with them (Mark 2:16), He bestowed His saving grace upon them (Luke 19:9), and He even chose a tax collector (Matthew) as one of His twelve disciples (Matt 9:9). By His attitude toward the tax collectors, Jesus showed that God’s covenant of grace extends to all people—not simply the righteous who observed the Law of the Old Testament. In fact, His message was that God would welcome the repentant and humble tax collector, while He would spurn the arrogant Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14). His mission was to bring sinners—people like the tax collectors of His day—into God’s presence (Matt 9:11-13).”

Not only the Pharisees and doctors of the law reacted to Jesus’ association with tax collectors. In a later chapter in Luke we read that, when Jesus invited Himself into Zacchaeus’ home, “all the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’”⁵³¹ Jesus’ attitude toward people who collaborated with the Roman occupiers did not mean that He condoned what the Romans did or approved of their imperialistic policies.

2. The lost sheep 15:3-7

3 Then Jesus told them this parable:

4 “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?

5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders

6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’

7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

We find this parable in Matthew also.⁵³² The theme of this short story was a very familiar one in Israel. David had been a shepherd before becoming king of Israel. His “Shepherd Psalm” became one of the most famous poems in the world literature. In another Psalm we read: “Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.”⁵³³ The Old Testament prophets used the image frequently. “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”⁵³⁴ And: “‘You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God,’ declares the Sovereign Lord.”⁵³⁵

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Now, there are two leading ideas in the three stories — one on the side of the Speaker; one on the side of those to whom the parable-stories were spoken.

- (1) *On the side of the speaker.* God’s anxiety for sinners is shown; he pities with a great pity their wretchedness; he sets, besides, a high value on their souls, as part of a treasure belonging to him.
- (2) *On the side of the listeners.* Their sympathy with him in his anxiety for sinners is claimed. He has sought it hitherto in vain. The imagery of the first story is very homely — easy, too, to understand. A small sheep-master pastures his little flock of a hundred sheep in one of those wide uncultivated plains which fringe portions of the land of promise. This is what we must understand by ‘the wilderness.’ The hundred sheep represent the people of Israel. The lost sheep, one who had broken with Jewish respectability. *One* only is mentioned as lost, not by any means as representing the small number of the outcast class — the contrary is the ease — but as indicative of the value in the eyes of the Father of *one* immortal soul.”

⁵³¹ Luke 19:7

⁵³² Matt. 18:12-14

⁵³³ Ps. 100:3

⁵³⁴ Isa. 53:6

⁵³⁵ Ezek. 34:31

Elsewhere, Jesus introduces Himself as the good Shepherd of the sheep who lays down His life in order to save the sheep.⁵³⁶

The first lesson to be draw from this parable is that tax collector and sinners were members of the people of Israel. God considered them to be as much the sheep of his flock as Pharisees and doctors of the law. But they were the kind of sheep Isaiah described, who have gone astray and turned their own way. Jesus associated with them and accepted their dinner invitations because He wanted them to be saved.

This parable does not mention the cost of their salvation; it would cost the Shepherd is life. The point of the story is that, if there were only one lost sheep, the shepherd would go and look for it in order to save it. If I were the only sinner in the world, Jesus would have died for me alone.

The shepherd is depicted as a person who loves his sheep. He knows that a sheep that strays away from the flock would be unable to find its way back. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* states: "No creature strays more easily than a sheep; none is more heedless; and none so incapable of finding its way back to the flock, when once gone astray: it will bleat for the flock, and still run on in an opposite direction to the place where the flock is; this I have often noticed. No creature is more defenseless than a sheep, and more exposed to be devoured by dogs and wild beasts. Even the fowls of the air seek their destruction. I have known ravens often attempt to destroy lambs by picking out their eyes, in which, when they have succeeded, as the creature does not see whither it is going, it soon falls an easy prey to its destroyer."

Having found the lost sheep, the shepherd puts it on his shoulder and carries it back to the flock. The most important part of a shepherd's task was to keep the sheep from wandering off. The shepherd's rod had a small scoop at the end with which he could pick up a small clod of earth and hurl it in the wandering sheep's direction to make it turn back to the fold. But in a herd of one hundred sheep it would be easy for one to take off without being noticed immediately. The loss would only be discovered at the count at the end of the day.

The finding of the sheep is a cause for celebration. Evidently, it was not a daily occurrence. A shepherd who lost one of his sheep every day would hardly be worth his wages. Friends and neighbors share in the joy of the find.

The venom is in the tail of the story. It is this joy over the salvation of a sinner that was lacking among the Pharisees and doctors of the law. They only had words of condemnation for those who did not obey the law. The word "compassion" was not in their dictionary. They were not lost, so why celebrate? That is where Jesus' story hits hard. Using their own language, Jesus calls them "righteous persons who do not need to repent." They were more lost than the tax collectors, but they didn't know it. That is the worst kind of lostness possible.

Heaven could not rejoice over their salvation, neither could they rejoice over the salvation of others. And there is a feast in heaven when people repent. God throws a party every time some gets saved.

3. The lost coin 15:8-10

8 *"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?"*

9 *And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'*

10 *In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

In the parable of the lost sheep, the object was a life creature; in this little story it is a silver coin of relatively little value. It is the condition of the owner, a woman who was obviously not well-to-do, who had lost what she considered to be valuable. Most Bible scholars agree that the amount of money involved was small. It was the poverty of the woman that determined the value. *Barnes' Notes* writes: "The drachma was about the value of fifteen cents, and consequently the whole sum was about a dollar and a half, or six shillings. The sum was small, but it was all she had. The loss of one piece, therefore, was severely felt."

⁵³⁶ John ch. 10

And *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* adds: “Coins were scarcer in Palestine than they are in modern civilization, for much commerce was carried on by barter. These coins were drachmas, each worth about fifteen to seventeen cents of American money. They represented the savings of many years.”

The story would have had much more meaning for the people to whom Jesus told it than it has for us as Westerners for whom a lost dime or a quarter would not be enough reason to perform a major house cleaning. If we want to make the story meaningful to modern readers we could exchange the drachma for the diamond of an engagement ring that a girl loses. That would call for a lot of sweeping under cupboards and shaking of rugs.

Some people frame the first dollar bill they ever earned in their life. That would make a good equivalent for the lost coin in this story.

Either the poverty of the woman or the emotional value of the lost item is what makes the find a major cause for celebration.

Jesus told the story because the Pharisees and teachers of the law had no burden for lost people. A human soul had no eternal value in their eyes. The relatively small value of the lost coin represented well their philosophy of the lostness of man.

Jesus, therefore, contrasts their attitude to the enthusiasm of the angels in heaven at the salvation of a tax collector or any other kind of sinner. There is an increase in exuberance as the parables continue. In the case of the finding of the lost sheep, we read: “There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” We the coin is found, we read: “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

This parable shows us the process of our being lost, being sought, and being found from God’s perspective. The important feature here is not our emotions and acts but His.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “Again, as in the parable of the lost sheep, we find this longing for sympathy; again the finding of this sympathy in heavenly places, among heavenly beings, is especially recorded. There is a slight difference in the language of rejoicing here. In the first parable it was, ‘Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep *which was* lost;’ here, ‘...for I have found the piece *which I had* lost.’ In the first it was the anguish of the sheep which was the central point of the story; in the second it was the distress of the woman who had lost something; hence this difference in the wording. ‘What grandeur belongs to the picture of this humble rejoicing which this poor woman celebrates with her neighbors, when it becomes the transparency through which we get a glimpse of God himself, rejoicing with his elect and his angels over the salvation of a single sinner!’”

The picture becomes more alive if we imagine ourselves, not in a well furnished home, but in a simple one-room house with an earthen floor and without hutches, tables, and chairs. Even on a sunny day, the room is poorly lit. The lamp the woman lights is a small oil lamp, such as tourists buy who visit Israel nowadays. The point of the parable is that we have value for God in the same way the silver coin had value for the woman. The coin was hers; she had worked for it, or her husband had given it to her. If the coin was clearly valuable for the woman, even more, man clearly has value for God.

4. The lost son 15:11-32

11 *Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons.*

12 *The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.*

13 *“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.*

14 *After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.*

15 *So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.*

16 *He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

17 *“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’*

18 *I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.*

19 *I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’*

20 *So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

21 *“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*

22 *“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.*

23 *Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.*

24 *For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.*

25 *“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.*

26 *So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.*

27 *‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’*

28 *“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.*

29 *But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.*

30 *But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’*

31 *“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.*

32 *But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”*

This parable of the prodigal has been called “the best short story ever told.” We don’t know if Jesus told all three parables that Luke records in this chapter in one sequence. Since the stories were told in response to the attitude of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, that is the most likely.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments about some theological questions regarding this parable, saying: “The human heart responds to the message of God’s forgiving love for the sinner so plainly set forth. This does not mean that they are right who say that since the parable does not speak of an atoning sacrifice no atonement is necessary. That would be a precarious conclusion, for Jesus is not dealing here with the whole gospel message but with the one great fact of the Father’s pardoning love. The story is not, in T. W. Manson’s words, ‘a complete compendium of theology’ and further, ‘If the carrying out of the purpose of God leads, as in fact it did, to the Cross, then it becomes the business of Christians to include the Cross in the purpose of God and to think out, as best they can, how the death of Christ is involved in God’s purpose of saving sinners.’”

There is a unique feature in this parable that sets it apart from the two previous ones. All three were told in response to that fact that “the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” In the first two parables the “sinners” were easily identifiable in the lost sheep and the lost coin. In this story there are two sons who both play an important part. The topic is two categories: on the one hand the tax collectors and “sinners” and on the other hand the Pharisees and teachers of the law. The younger son obviously represents the first group and the older boy the second. The joy of God is brought into this story in the father’s reaction to his son’s return.

The lostness of the younger son is illustrated in the way he handled life. The question is whether his older brother did any better. It is true that he did not use his father's money to spend it on pleasure and prostitutes. Actually, we do not read that he spent it at all. He acted as if the father had never given him any. In reply to his father's insistence to come and celebrate his brother's return, he bitterly observed: "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends." Yet, we read in the beginning of the story that the father divided his property between his two sons. The older one probably received the larger share. According to the rabbinic law he would get two-third of it all.

The younger son's attitude toward his father was more than blameworthy. A heritage is usually not divided before the death of the owner of the property. What the younger son actually said to his father was: "I can't wait till you die! Why don't you give it now?" There was no love for the father in his heart.

But the older boy did not enjoy a father-son relationship either. He considered his father to be a severe and frugal taskmaster. The words "you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends" make little sense in the light of the statement: "So he divided his property between them." As it turned out the older son did not know any better what to do with the inheritance his father had given him than his younger brother did. He never took a young goat from the whole herd his father had given him.

There was little fundamental difference in the attitude of the older son and the younger. He had no more a bond of personal love with his father than his younger brother had.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states about the younger son's request: "The younger son gave no reason for his request, but when the father consented it quickly became apparent. Once he had control of his inheritance he soon set out to see the world. *He gathered all he had*: he left nothing that would serve as an anchor and bring him back in due course. With ample funds at first and with much to see and do he *squandered his property*. RSV says this was *in loose living*, but the adjective *loose* should probably be understood as 'reckless.' Phillips gives the sense of it with 'he squandered his wealth in the wildest extravagance.'"

The Greek text of v.13 reads literally: "And after not many days the younger son gathered all together, [and] took his journey into a far country and there wasted his substance in riotous living." The Greek word used is *asotos*, which is only found in this verse in the New Testament. It is derived from the word *asotia*, which means "riot," or "excess." The latter is found in three other verses: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to *debauchery*;"⁵³⁷ "An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being *wild* and disobedient,"⁵³⁸ and "They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of *dissipation*."⁵³⁹

The young man's request for the share of his inheritance while his father was still alive was an act of rebellion. As he left home, he took this rebellion with him. His attitude, both at home and abroad was that he could handle life; no one could tell him how to do it. It took God's act of sever mercy in which he was cleaned to the bone, for him to realize that he could not handle life on his own.

The question is whether his older brother knew how to handle life. And the answer is that he did not either. There was as much rebellion in him against his father's authority as there had been in his younger brother. His refusal to join the celebration of his brother's return was as much an act of rebellion as his younger brother's "riotous living." The parable gives us the clearest definition of sin as rebellion against God.

As long as the younger brother had money to spend he had lots of friends, but when he ran out of money his friends ran out of him. He found out the truth of Solomon's proverb: "The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends."⁵⁴⁰ Not only had his money disappeared but the whole country in which he had taken residence experienced an economic and financial collapse. A famine brought him to total ruin. When he hired himself out to a pig farmer, he did not even make enough money to buy food for himself.

⁵³⁷ Eph. 5:18

⁵³⁸ Titus 1:6

⁵³⁹ I Peter 4:4

⁵⁴⁰ Prov. 14:20

In this way God got his attention. He realized that his rebellious attitude toward his father had been part of his rebellion against God. Most of problems in human relationships can be traced to a faulty relationship with God. It is only when we “love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] strength and with all [our] mind,” that we can “love your neighbor as yourself.” He realized that his first sin had been against heaven and then against his father.

V.17 reads literally in Greek: “And when he came to himself, he said . . .” This is correctly rendered in the NIV: “When he came to his senses, he said . . .” Hunger cleared the mind. It makes us realize that “man cannot live by bread alone.”

As *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes: “repentance is represented as a restoration to sound sense.” Sin inhibits a sense of realism. Repentance makes one realistic.

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary comments on the son’s repentance: “What was the occasion of his return and repentance? It was his affliction; when he was in want, then he came to himself. Note, Afflictions, when they are sanctified by divine grace, prove happy means of turning sinners from the error of their ways. By them the ear is opened to discipline and the heart disposed to receive instructions; and they are sensible proofs both of the vanity of the world and of the mischievousness of sin. Apply it spiritually. When we find the insufficiency of creatures to make us happy, and have tried all other ways of relief for our poor souls in vain, then it is time to think of returning to God. When we see what miserable comforters, what physicians of no value, all but Christ are, for a soul that groans under the guilt and power of sin, and no man gives unto us what we need, then surely we shall apply ourselves to Jesus Christ.”

The boy translates his reflections into action. He starts out on the long journey home, this time without any sustenance to keep him going, except for the hope of arrival. As his father’s son, he had claimed his right on part of the inheritance. When he received that part prematurely, he had left home and squandered his possessions and his life. Going home, he realizes that he has lost the right to be called a son. He rehearses the words of repentance he planned to say to his father and he is going to ask his father to give him a job as a hired hand. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains that: “Hired servants in Bible times had a harder lot than slaves, because their employment was more uncertain, whereas slaves could be sure of food and shelter.”

He must have expected his father to receive him with lots of reservation if he would be received at all, but he figured it was worth trying. It is obvious that, up to that point, he had never known what kind of person the father really was.

The story is usually called “The prodigal son.” *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the word “prodigal” – “recklessly extravagant,” “wasteful,” “lavish.” One Bible scholar speaks about “the prodigal father,” saying that the father was just as extravagant as his youngest son had been.

The reception the young man received was far beyond anything he could have anticipated. He had never understood the love of his father because he had never loved anyone but himself. It is obvious that the father had suffered much during the boy’s absence. He had never accepted the possibility that his boy would be lost forever. Every day he had been on the lookout for his return and when, one day, he sees a tramp in the distance, his heart recognized his son before his eyes did.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on the father’s actions: “Plainly the old man had hoped and watched for such a return. Jesus emphasizes the welcome the father gave his unworthy son. He saw him while he was *still at a distance*, he *had compassion*, he *ran* (which was striking in an elderly Oriental) and he *kissed him* (cf. David’ forgiving kiss of Absalom, 2 Sam. 14:33). This last verb, *katephilēsen*, may mean ‘kissed him many times’ or ‘kissed him tenderly.’”

Barnes’ Notes observes about the meaning of the father’s attitude in the parable: “This is evidently designed to denote the ‘readiness of God’ to pity and pardon returning sinners. In this verse of inimitable beauty is contained the point of the parable, which was uttered by the Savior to vindicate ‘his own conduct’ in receiving sinners kindly. Who could ‘blame’ this father for thus receiving his repenting son? Not even a Pharisee could blame him; and our Savior thus showed them, so that ‘they’ could not resist it, that ‘God’ received returning sinners, and that it was right for ‘him’ also to receive them and treat them with attention.”

There is some sound theology in the father's terminology that must have been completely lost on Jesus' audience. The father said about his younger son: "this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." In the same way as in the preceding parables the lost sheep and the lost penny were found, so here the son is found. The difference is, of course, that the sheep or the penny were not found because they wanted to be. In the case of the lost son, his will to return was what made him be found. We could say that, in a way, when we sin we disappear from God's field of vision. I know that this is not the correct theological terminology, but it comes closest to what happens. Fellowship with God is broken by sin. David sang in one of his psalms: "But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine."⁵⁴¹

Then there is the definition of sin as a form of death and of repentance as a kind of resurrection. Both are the correct terms of our experience when we sin and when we repent. It is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that allows us to repent and receive new life in fellowship with God. Jesus' death and resurrection had not occurred yet at the time this parable was spoken, but for us, who have the historic perspective, it is clear how our heavenly Father can pour out His kindness, grace and affection upon us when we tell Him we are sorry.

In a way, the whole point of the parable is in the oldest son's attitude, both toward his brother and his father. As the younger boy typified the tax collectors and sinner, so did the older one represent the Pharisees and doctors of the law.

The older brother comes home from the field while the celebration is going on inside the house. He hears the music from a distance and recognizes the dance tunes. When he hears, upon inquiry, what has happened, that his father has killed the calf that had been kept for special occasions, he blows his top. He probably said to himself that he had always known that his father loved his younger brother more than him. He had spent his life trying to please his father and it had all been for naught. He had never understood what fatherly love meant, because he had never given filial love to his father either. Elsewhere, Jesus said about the Pharisees and doctors of the law: "I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts."⁵⁴² They could not share in God's compassion for sinners, because they had never experience God's love in their own lives.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The Pharisees and rulers could not fail at once to catch the drift of the Master's parable. They too, when the Lord came and gathered in that great harvest of sinners, those firstfruits of his mighty work — they too were 'in the field' at work with their tithings and observances, making hedge after hedge round the old sacred Hebrew Law, uselessly fretting their lives away in a dull round of meaningless ritual observances. They — the Pharisee party — when they became aware of the great crowds of men, whom they looked on as lost sinners, listening to the new famous Teacher, who was showing them how men who had lived their lives too could win eternal life — they, the Pharisees, flamed out with bitter wrath against the bold and daring Preacher of glad tidings to such a worthless crew. In the vivid parable-story these indignant Pharisees and rulers saw themselves clearly imaged."

The joy of celebration in the parable represents the joy that was described in the other parables as the joy of heaven in vv. 7 and 10. What Jesus is actually saying to these leaders of the Jewish nation is that they refused to enter heaven. They would not even like it there because of the tax collectors and other sinners that would populate the place.

OO. Teaching, mostly about money 16:1-31

1. The unjust steward 16:1-9

1 Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions.

2 So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

⁵⁴¹ Ps. 33:18,19

⁵⁴² John 5:42

3 *“The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg—*

4 I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’ 5 “So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

6 “‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied.” The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.’

7 “Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’” ‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. “He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’

8 “The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.

9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

In introducing this parable, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states: “This is notoriously one of the most difficult parables to interpret. The root problem is the commendation of the steward who is so plainly dishonest (8). The usual explanation is that the steward is commended, not for his dishonesty, but for taking resolute action in a crisis.”

The difficulty in this parable is, in fact, in the application. It is obvious that the Lord does not want us to emulate the sinister practices of this crook. The words “The master commended the dishonest manager” do not mean that the master was pleased by the fact that his manager had used his money to bribe other people. The real point of the story is in the words “For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.” The Greek word rendered “shrewd” is *phronimos*, which is derived from a word meaning “prudent.” This is the only place in the New Testament where this word is found. *The New Living Translation* renders v.8: “The rich man had to admire the dishonest rascal for being so shrewd.”

It is possible for us to admire the way some criminal pull off a heist, not because we approve of their act but because the way the crime was committed gave evidence of careful and intelligent planning.

In handling his master’s money the steward acted as if it was his own. He used it to enrich himself. He operated as if he was not accountable to his master for the way he took care of his master’s business.

That point in itself opens the way to a variety of important applications. Many people, if not most, act as if their life is their own and that they will never be held accountable for the way they live. That determines the way we use our body and our material possessions. Some years ago when the issue of abortion rights came up, some women used the slogan “Master of our own belly!” Since we did not make ourselves, we are accountable to the One who made us. The way we handle money may be the best thermometer of our philosophy of life.

The point Jesus makes in this parable is that there ought to be a difference between us and an atheist in the way we live.

According to the atheist, life ends with death. He may prepare for old age but that is all. Christians know that real life only begins with death, but many usually only makes the same preparations for the time to come as does the atheist. The saying goes about money: “You can’t take it with you.” But Scripture teaches us that we can send it ahead. Jesus says in *The Sermon on the Mount*: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”⁵⁴³ If we plan to make a long trip overseas, we can send some of our money ahead to a foreign bank.

Our Lord makes a comparison between money and “true riches.” He calls these “true riches,” “property of your own.” Money is called: “very little,” and “true riches”: “much.” Material possessions on earth are a

⁵⁴³ Matt. 6:19-21

shadow of a heavenly reality. God entrusts them to us in this life to put us to the test. This is one of the hardest lessons to learn in life. It is so easy to spend money, especially if it pertains to small sums, without the notion that we have to give an account of all we do.

The person who uses money for himself, actually, cheats himself. He believes he serves himself while in reality he is a slave of mammon. There is no mention of self-serving in the Bible. This is implied in Jesus' statement in *The Sermon on the Mount*: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."⁵⁴⁴ Satan uses money to deceive us. Those who apply themselves to acquire riches lose track of reality. Money cannot buy us anything more than items to fill the material needs of our life. Those who believe that money is power have their eyes on the wrong kind of power. Riches has never brought anyone happiness. In spite of this, the myth lives on. It is not without reason that Jesus uses the image of thorns and thistles to represent "the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth."⁵⁴⁵ Real riches consist in being rich toward God.⁵⁴⁶

The Greek text of v.9 reads literally: "And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness; that when you fail, they may receive you in the everlasting habitations." The only other place in Scripture where the word "Mammon" occurs is in the verse: "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."⁵⁴⁷ Although "mammon" is spoken of as a person, there is no proof that an idol, personifying riches existed in any of the cultures surrounding Israel. Most Bible scholars interpret the word simply as meaning "riches." People can make money their idol. And if they do they will receive a good deal of help from the Lord's enemy, who is the enemy of their souls also.

Back to the parable: The manager in the story had mismanaged his master's money. This had been reported to his master and he was about to lose his job and probably face incarceration to pay back his debts. When the master calls his manager, he tells him he is fired and that he has to bring him the books. We are given no details about who reported the mismanagement or what the manager's methods of embezzlement had been. It seems as if there were no books kept, because when the manager called in his master's debtors he had to ask them how much they owed. In doing his work, this man had not used his "smarts."

What made him use his brain was the jolt of the knowledge that he was going to be fired. Evidently, he had never used his master's money to befriend other people; he had merely been very sloppy in the way he did his work, thus losing money.

Most of the transactions were done in barter. The master must have been a landowner who farmed wheat and olives.

In calling in his master's debtors the manager made them partners in crime. He asked the first one to change his IOU from eight hundred gallons of olive oil to four hundred and the second to change his bill from one thousand bushels of wheat to eight hundred. They both complied, becoming crooked as he was.

The Greek text uses the words *batos* and *koros* for the amounts mentioned. *Batos* is a measure for liquids and *koros* for dried goods. Both words are unique in the New Testament and only occur in these verses. It is difficult to determine the amounts involved in the story and they have no bearing on the meaning of the parable.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on the manager's actions in preparation for his dismissal: "As long as he was officially steward, he had the power to set the amount of rental payments; and until he was discharged, his decisions must stand. Even if the owner dismissed him, he could not alter the decisions which the steward had made previously."

⁵⁴⁴ Matt. 6:24

⁵⁴⁵ Matt. 13:22

⁵⁴⁶ Luke 12:21

⁵⁴⁷ Matt. 6:24 - NKJV

What the manager did in preparation for his “retirement” was making his master’s debtors his accomplices. Their mutual guilt would bind them together and made one to have obligations toward the other. That would give the first crook an open door in the home of the others.

The application of the parable seems to be that Jesus wants us to apply the negative principle that governed the manager’s behavior in a positive way in our relationship with others. We can bind people to us by sharing the Gospel of salvation with them. Those who accept Jesus as Savior and Lord of their lives because of our testimony will feel some kind of obligation toward us. If we can look forward to going to heaven and have people welcome us there, saying that they are there because of us, we have more to look forward to than merely our own salvation.

The master’s admiration for his steward was not because of what he had done but how he had done it. He had been shrewd in preparing for his retirement. He had thought about life to come and made preparations. It seems that the main lesson Jesus wants us to draw from this parable is that we must be smart and prepare for eternity while going through life on earth. It has been said that some people are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good. That may be the meaning of the conclusion Jesus gives in the words: “For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.” Jesus wants us to be as shrewd in doing good as the crooked manager was in doing evil. Paul’s words in Romans correspond with this: “I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.”⁵⁴⁸ In sending out His disciples elsewhere, Jesus told them: “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”⁵⁴⁹

The NIV reads: “I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves.” The Greek text reads literally: “And I say unto you, make friends to yourselves of the mammon of unrighteousness.” It is obvious that money in itself has no moral value. It may be called “filthy lucre,” but that does not mean that it has intrinsic value. Money will be clean or filthy according to the way we use it.

And it is obvious that the parable is not about money as such, but about reliability in the way we handle what has been entrusted to us. This world is not our own since we did not create it. Our life and our body are not our own either. The Lord will hold us accountable for the way we live and for what we do with that which is His.

5. God and mammon 16:10-13

10 “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?

13 “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

These verses spell out the application of the preceding parable. What we do on earth with things entrusted to us will reveal the reliability or the lack of it and determines what our responsibilities will be in eternity.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “We have here the broad rule, upon which God will decide the soul’s future, laid down. If the man has been faithful in his administration of the comparatively unimportant goods of earth, it is clear that he can be entrusted with the far more important things which belong to the world to come. There is, too, in these words a kind of limitation and explanation of the foregoing parable of the unjust steward. The conduct of that steward, regarded in one point of view, was held to be wise, and we, though in a very different way, were advised to imitate it; yet here we are distinctly told that it is fidelity, not unfaithfulness, which will be *eventually* re-warded — the just, not the unjust steward.”

⁵⁴⁸ Rom. 16:19

⁵⁴⁹ Matt. 10:16

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary adds: “The use of material wealth is a test of character. Those who cannot use it wisely do not deserve to have spiritual responsibilities entrusted to them.”

The interesting question Jesus asks is “How trustworthy are you?” Or, “Can God trust you?” What makes the question rhetoric in a way is the fact that God knows us through and through. He knows that we cannot be trusted in the way we are naturally. John states in his Gospel: “Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.”⁵⁵⁰ We can only become trustworthy if we surrender to the Holy Spirit’s leading in our life.

In writing to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of being reliable in serving the Lord. We read: “So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”⁵⁵¹

Jesus depicts this as a kind of slavery. “No servant can serve two masters” speaks about a slave who serves his master because his master bought him. The servant does not belong to himself; he has been paid for. There was a place for slavery in Israel as a form of payment of indebtedness. A person could sell himself to his creditor in order to pay off a loan. The Mosaic Law provided for this kind of arrangement and limited to time of service to seven years.⁵⁵² In Jesus’ days, when Israel was under Roman occupation, the slavery that existed in the Roman Empire was practiced in Israel also. It was obvious that a slave could not be the property of two masters; he belonged to the one who had bought him. The Apostle Paul made a spiritual application of this by writing to the Corinthians: ‘Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.’⁵⁵³ The Apostle Peter describes this transaction with the words: “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”⁵⁵⁴

In connection with this kind of slavery Jesus uses the words “love,” “hate,” “devoted” and “despise.” Those words had little place in the literal slavery of Jesus’ day, but they are vital in our spiritual relationship. Paul uses the image of slavery in connection with our being sold to sin and suggests that we respond by offering our bodies to God as “instruments of righteousness.”⁵⁵⁵ Serving Mammon is spawned by greed, which in Scripture is called “idolatry.”⁵⁵⁶

6. The covetous Pharisees 16:14-15

14 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.

15 He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”

The parable of the crooked steward caught the attention of the Pharisees. They must have had the impression that Jesus had them in mind in telling that story. They considered themselves to be God’s stewards for the people of Israel. Jesus had earlier pronounced His “woe” on them.⁵⁵⁷ And, evidently, they had not forgotten that. The Apostle Paul, who used to be a Pharisee, knew their mentality very well. That may have been the reason he wrote to Timothy: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”⁵⁵⁸

The Pulpit Commentary observes about the Pharisees’ reaction to Jesus’ words: “The scornful words alluded to in the expression, ‘they derided him,’ were no doubt directed against the outward poverty of the

⁵⁵⁰ John 2:24,25

⁵⁵¹ I Cor. 4:1,2

⁵⁵² Ex. 21:2-4

⁵⁵³ I Cor. 6:19,20

⁵⁵⁴ I Peter 1:18,19

⁵⁵⁵ Rom. 6:6,13

⁵⁵⁶ Col. 3:5

⁵⁵⁷ Luke 11:42,43

⁵⁵⁸ I Tim. 6:10

popular Galilaeen Teacher. ‘It is all very well,’ they would say, ‘for one springing from the ranks of the people, landless, moneyless, to rail at wealth and the possessors of wealth; we can understand such teaching from one such as *you*.’”

Service to God and love of money are irreconcilable entities. Love of money enslaves a person. People tend to think that money buys independence, but in reality it leads to slavery. Service of God sets one free; serving Mammon enslaves.

There is great danger in wanting to project oneself as a pious or a praying person. Jesus issues a warning against praying on the street corners. He tells us that intimacy with God ought to be exercised in private, not in public.⁵⁵⁹ If we have to show people how spiritual we are, we are not very spiritual.

“What is highly valued” is the rendering of the one Greek word *hupselos*, which means “lofty.” We find the word for the first time in the New Testament in the verse: “Again, the devil took him to *a very high mountain* and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.”⁵⁶⁰ We could say that that which makes people look up to us, is what makes God look down upon us. The important thing in life is to take into consideration not what people think about us, but how God values us. It is His honor we ought to seek, not human adulation.

7. The law and the prophets 16:16-17

16 *“The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.*

17 *It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.*

The first part of Jesus’ statement is easy to understand. The message of the Old Testament lasted until the coming of John the Baptist. John was the last Old Testament prophet and, as all other Old Testament prophets, he preached the coming of the Messiah. The coming of Jesus marked the beginning of the kingdom of God. The problem for us is the statement “everyone is forcing his way into it.” The Greek text reads literally: “Every man presses in to it.” The Greek verb used is *biazo*, which can be rendered “to force,” or “to be forced.” The same verb is used in Matthew’s version of Jesus statement, which reads differently: “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.”⁵⁶¹

Adam Clarke’s interpreters the phrase: “He who wishes to be made a partaker of the blessings of that kingdom must rush speedily into it; as there will be but a short time before an utter destruction shall fall upon this ungodly race. They who wish to be saved must imitate those who take a city by storm-rush into it, without delay, as the Romans are about to do into Jerusalem.”

Barnes’ Notes states: “This is an expression that is very common, as when we say everybody is engaged in a piece of business, meaning that it occupies general attention.”

And *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on it: “While publicans and sinners are eagerly pressing into the kingdom of God, ye, interested adherents of the mere forms of an economy which is passing away, ‘discerning not the signs of this time,’ are allowing the tide to go past you, and will be found a stranded monument of blindness and obstinacy.”

Finally, *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “Some expositors discern so little connection between the sayings contained in these verses which intervene between the two great parables of the unjust steward and the rich man and Lazarus, that they consider them as a number of sayings of the Master collected by Luke and inserted here. A clear thread, however, runs through the whole piece between the two parables. Probably, however, here, as in many parts of the Gospel, we only have just a bare sketch, or *précis*, of what the Lord said; hence its fragmentary character. Here (in the sixteenth verse), the Master went on speaking to the Pharisees who derided him (ver. 14). ‘Up to the period of John the Baptist,’ said the Master, ‘the old state of things may be said to have continued in force. With him began a new era; no longer were the old

⁵⁵⁹ See Matt. 6:5,6.

⁵⁶⁰ Matt. 4:8

⁵⁶¹ Matt. 11:12

privileges to be confined to Israel exclusively; gradually the kingdom of God was to be enlarged, the old wall of separation was to be taken down. See, every man is pressing into it; the new state of things has already begun; you see it in the crowds of publicans, sinners, Samaritans, and others pressing round me when I speak of the kingdom of God.”

V.17 must be considered the most important part of this whole statement. The Greek text reads literally: “And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than of the law one title to fail.” All of creation is placed next to the law, that is next to the revealed will of God. Maybe even better, next to the character of God, for the law is the expression of God’s character. Looking at the law as a whole we must bear in mind that it represents more than just the Ten Commandments. The law embodies the code of human behavior that is acceptable to God and also the provisions for instances in which we fail to live up to the demands of the law. The latter part is the ceremonial law that provides atonement for human sin. The fact that Jesus had come to earth “to give His life as a ransom for many”⁵⁶² is just as much part of the law as all the rest. The preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom of God does not eliminate the need for the law; it embodies it.

Creation is not eternal, but the character of God and the revelation of His character lasts forever.

8 Divorce 16:18

18 “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

It is difficult to see the link between the preceding and following sections of this chapter with, what seems to be an interruption of logical thought in inserting this remark about divorce at this place.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “Luke and Paul, different to the great masters of profane history, like Thucydides, or Livy, or Xenophon, were evidently at no pains to round off their narratives. They give us the account of the Lord’s words and works very much as they had them from the first listeners and eye-witnesses. When the notes and memories were very scant and fragmentary, as appear to have been the case in the Lord’s discourse which St. Luke interposes between the parable of the steward and that of Dives and Lazarus, the fragmentary notes are reproduced without any attempt to round off the condensed, and at first sight apparently disconnected, utterances. So here, directly after the fragmentary report of certain sayings of Jesus, the great parable of Lazarus and Dives is introduced with somewhat startling abruptness; nothing of St. Luke’s is added — simply the original report as Luke or Paul received it is reproduced. The following is probably the connection in which the famous parable was spoken. When the Lord spoke the parable-story of the unjust steward, he pressed home to the listeners, as its great lesson, the necessity of providing against the day of death, and he showed how, by the practice of kindness here towards the poor, the weak, and the suffering, they would make to themselves friends who would in their turn be of use to them — who would, in their hour of sore need, when death swept them out of this life, receive them into everlasting habitations. We believe that the Master, as he spoke these things, purposed — either on that very occasion, or very shortly after, when his listeners were again gathered together — supplementing this important teaching by another parable, in which the good of having friends in the world to come should be clearly shown. The parable of Lazarus as Dives, then, may be regarded as a piece of teaching following on to and closely connected with the parable of the unjust steward. Nine verses, however, as we have seen are inserted between the two parables. Of these, vers. 10-13 are simply some reflections of the Master on the parable of the steward just spoken. Then comes ver. 14 — a scornful interruption on the part of the Pharisee listeners. Our Lord replies to this (vers. 15-18), and then goes on, either then or very soon after, to the same auditory, with the parable of Lazarus and Dives, which is, in fact, a direct sequel to the parable of the unjust steward, and which St. Luke proceeds to relate without any further preamble.”

Regarding Jesus’ remark about divorce, the commentary states: “The teaching of the rabbis in the time of our Lord on the question of the marriage was exceedingly lax, and tended to grave immorality in the family life. In the late unlawful marriage of Herod Antipas with Herodias, in which so many sacred and family ties were rudely torn asunder, no rabbi or doctor in Israel but one had raised his voice in indignant protest, and that one was the friend and connection of Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet John the Baptist. Divorce for the most trivial causes was sanctioned by the rabbis, and even such men as Hillel, the grandfather of that

⁵⁶² Matt. 20:28

Gamaliel whom tradition speaks of as the rabbi whose lectures were listened to by the Boy Jesus, taught that a man might divorce his wife if in the cooking she burnt his dinner or even over-salted his soup.”

Seen in this light, Jesus’ remarks about divorce can be seen as a paradigm of the fact that God’s plan for marriage between man and wife is an illustration of the requirement of the law that will outlast all of creation. The fact that in marriage a man and a woman become “one flesh” exemplifies, in Paul’s word the profound mystery about Christ and the church.⁵⁶³

9. The rich man and Lazarus 16:19-31

19 *“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.*

20 *At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores*

21 *and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

22 *“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried.*

23 *In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.*

24 *So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’*

25 *“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.*

26 *And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’*

27 *“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house,*

28 *for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’*

29 *“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’*

30 *“‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’*

31 *“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”*

In introducing this parable, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “This is parable is peculiar to Luke. Many see it as an adaptation of a popular folk-tale, perhaps originating in Egypt, which contrasted the eternal fates of a bad rich man and a virtuous poor man. If Jesus has taken over a popular tale, he has given it a stamp of his own. As it stands it marks a contrast with the attitude inculcated in the parable of the unrighteous steward. Perhaps we can go further back and say that this chapter challenges the elder son in the previous parable and with him all the respectable who act in the spirit of the unrighteous steward. They should repent and then help other with their money. The alternative is to use their money in such a way as to secure eternal condemnation.”

Some people doubt whether this is a parable, believing that Jesus may have been described an existing situation at that moment. The story is not a parable in the sense that it illustrates a truth that is not reflected in the details of the tale. The parable illustrates the remark Jesus had made earlier: “What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”

It may be true that Jesus depicts a reality that is more extreme than could be found in real life. It is difficult to imagine that a rich man would have let a poor, sore-covered beggar lie on the threshold of his kitchen without either feeding him some or chasing him away. Both the rich man and Lazarus seem to be bigger than life in the story.

In real life everyone would have known the name of the rich man and Lazarus would have remained nameless. *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes a sermon by Augustine, in which he said that the Lord had

⁵⁶³ Eph. 5:31,32

looked for the rich man's name in the *Book of Life* and had not found it. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: "In contrast is the *poor man*, called *Lazarus* (i.e. Eleazar; the name means 'God has helped' and may be significant; certainly man did not help this unfortunate). He is the only character given a name in Jesus' parables. Sometimes the rich man is called 'Dives,' but this is simply the Latin for 'rich man.'"

The rich man threw lavish dinner parties for his friends of which Lazarus could see the preparations being made from the kitchen threshold on which he was lying. Lazarus' company consisted of dogs that licked his sores.

Such was life, but such was not death for either of them. When the rich man came to the end of his life he was buried with pomp and honor. We don't read that there was any ceremony on earth at the death of Lazarus. His body may have been dumped somewhere, although Jewish laws were rather strict on that point. Lazarus' soul ends up in heaven "at Abraham's side." The Greek text reads literally: "And it came to pass [that] the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." Rather than interpreting this in a literal sense and deducting from where the souls of believers go, it seems better to see in it a popular expression of a place of bliss and peace after death. Jesus mentions Abraham and the other patriarchs as members in the kingdom of heaven.⁵⁶⁴ Lazarus entered as a guest of honor at the banquet that God ordered for him as a member of His family, the children of Israel.

When the rich man died, we read that as he closed his eyes on earth, he opened them "in hell." The Greek word used is *Hades*. There are several words used in Scripture to describe the abode of the dead. The most frequent one used in the Old Testament is *Sheol*, which simply means the place where the soul goes at the moment of death. The term that refers to a place of torment is probably *Gehenna*, which originally indicated the valley of Hinnom, outside the city of Jerusalem. The place of torment the Apostle Peter indicates as the abode of fallen angels is called *Tartarus*.⁵⁶⁵ That may be the closest to what we think of when we speak of the place where the souls of the lost go.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the rich man's burial: "There is a terrible irony here in this mention of burial. This human pageantry of woe was for the rich man what the carrying by the angels into Abraham's bosom was for Lazarus — it was *his* equivalent; but while these empty honors were being paid to his senseless, deserted body, the rich man was already gazing on the surroundings of his new and cheerless home. After the moment's sleep of death, what an awakening!"

Interestingly, nothing is said in the story about the spiritual condition of both individuals. The rich man's attitude shows that he never took God seriously in his life; otherwise he would not have left Lazarus die at his doorstep. The fact that Lazarus hoped in God can only be deducted from the fact that he ended up in Abraham's bosom after death. The parable does not condemn riches or glorify poverty. The rich man ended up in hell, not because he had been rich on earth, but because he had not loved his neighbor as himself. That, in itself, was proof of the fact that he had not loved the Lord with all his heart, soul and mind. His lack of neighborly love indicated that he never believed and obeyed the Word of God: "Moses and the prophets."

We must be careful to build a theology of heaven or hell upon the details of this parable. The point of Jesus' story, I believe, is not to give us detailed information about what heaven and hell will be like. There is probably more reality in the conclusion of the story of the crooked steward, in which Jesus speaks of life after death as "true riches," and "property of your own," than in this parable. I do not mean to say that heaven will not be ultimate bliss and hell extreme suffering. But whether heaven will be sitting at the same table with Abraham and hell experiencing physical thirst, can hardly be established upon the details of this parable. It seems also unlikely that conversation will be carried on across the chasm that separates the two places.

Commenting on the description of the rich man's suffering, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The doomed one speaks of a flame and of his tongue apparently burning, owing to the scorching heat; but it would be a mistake to think of a material flame being intended here. There is nothing in the description of the situation to suggest this; it is rather the burning never to be satisfied, longing for something utterly beyond his reach, that the unhappy man describes as an inextinguishable flame. Were it desirable to dwell on these torments,

⁵⁶⁴ Matt. 8:11

⁵⁶⁵ II Peter 2:4

we should remind men how lustful desires change rapidly into torture for the soul when the means for gratifying them exist not.”

It is quite possible that an important part of the suffering of the doomed is the realization of what they could have had if they had obeyed to revealed will of God. If this awareness is accentuated by the sight of the bliss of those who are saved cannot be concluded with absolute surety from this story. If we accept that those who are lost can see those who are saved, we must also conclude that those who are saved can see the lost, and that would mar the perfection of their blessedness. We may assume that the chasm is so deep and wide that no real communication is possible between one side and the other.

The question to ask at this point is, what is the purpose of this parable, what is the moral of the story?

Jesus told the story for the benefit of the Pharisees, “who loved money.” Their only focus in life was earthly riches that provided them with comfort and ease. They did not use their possession to make friends for eternity, as the crooked steward in the previous parable ended up doing. In *The Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus had said: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”⁵⁶⁶ And to the rich young man, Jesus said: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.”⁵⁶⁷ The Pharisees preached “Moses and the prophets,” but they were too shortsighted to practice what they preached. They lived on earth as if they would remain here forever. The lesson of the unjust steward was completely lost on them. They did not prepare for life to come.

It has been said that two minutes in hell made the rich man into an evangelist. He wanted to Gospel to be preached to his five brothers, who, evidently, lived the same life of affluence and selfishness as he had lived on earth. He asked Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth to warn them of the consequences of their lavish and selfish lifestyle. The answer he gets is that this would not work. People who pay no attention to the written Word of God would not take seriously the appearance of Lazarus’ ghost either.

Abraham said to the rich man, what Jesus says to the Pharisees: “You have Moses and the prophets!” The Pharisees would agree with that statement. But, as Stephen would later ask them in his defense speech at the Sanhedrin: “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?”⁵⁶⁸

A. Teaching about service 17:1-10

1. Forgiving others 17:1-4

1 *Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come.*

2 *It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.*

3 *So watch yourselves. “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.*

4 *If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”*

Bible scholars have argued about the sequence of events in Luke’s Gospel. There is no indication that Jesus is still addressing the Pharisees in this chapter, as He did in the previous one.

Matthew and Mark record Jesus’ words in connection with little children who are brought to sin because of the example of adults.⁵⁶⁹ Whether that is the scene Luke portrays here is not certain. It may be that Jesus used similar words at different occasions. There is mention of “these little ones.”

⁵⁶⁶ Matt. 6:19-21

⁵⁶⁷ Matt. 19:21

⁵⁶⁸ Acts 7:51,52

⁵⁶⁹ Matt. 18:6; Mark 9:42

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The ‘little ones’ whom these offences would injure are clearly in this instance not children, although, of course, the words would include the very young, for whom Jesus ever showed the tenderest love; but the reference is clearly to disciples whose faith was only as yet weak and wavering — to men and women who would be easily influenced either for good or evil.”

It may be good to interpret Jesus’ words as a warning to adults to make them realize how their sinful behavior would have its effect upon the lives of their children. This does not mean that children would only commit sin if they are taught to do so by adults. Each one of us came into this world with our own sinful nature. David confessed: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”⁵⁷⁰

It seems that Jesus speaks here particularly about the sin of unwillingness to forgive those who have hurt us in life.

The Greek word rendered “things that cause people to sin,” is *skandalon*, which literally means “a trap-stick,” or “snare.” The English word “scandal” is derived from it. The KJV renders it occasionally as “stumbling block.” More seems to be involved than merely setting a bad example; it probably refers to offering a temptation to sin. It would certainly include sexual temptations, but it is not limited to that.

Jesus offers some very harsh words to those who make it a point of making others fall into sin, whatever the kind may be.

What is particular shocking in Jesus’ statement is the fact that the sin focused on is the unwillingness to forgive. In *Matthew’s Gospel* Jesus tells the story of the servant to whom a debt of ten thousand talents had been forgiven and who refused to forgive someone who owed him one hundred denarii.⁵⁷¹ Those who have trouble forgiving others fail to understand what is involved in their own salvation. What we owe to God puts all other earthly indebtedness in the shade. It is important to keep the right perspective in this.

Jesus does not mention specifically what punishment awaits those who make it a point to tempt others into a life of sin; He mentions the preferable alternative of undergoing death by drowning with a huge stone tied to one’s neck. The illustration is almost too extreme to be real. It is hard to imagine someone being drowned with a millstone tied to his body. It would take several persons to carry the stone plus the weight of the body. The point of the picture is that eternal punishment, such as the rich man suffered in hell, is worse than anything imaginable on earth.

All this is said, as observed above, in the context of forgiving others for offenses against our person. In other words, the sin in question is “holding a grudge.” Forgiving must be absolute, otherwise it has no relationship to the pardon we received from God. If God hurls “our iniquities into the depths of the sea,”⁵⁷² there is no reason for us to hold grudges against those who offend us, even if the offenses are frequent and repeated. In *Matthew’s Gospel* it is Peter who brings up the question of forgiveness and suggests that seven times would be the limit. Jesus answered to this: “Not seven times, but seventy-seven times,”⁵⁷³ meaning, there is no limit to forgiving.

2. Faith 17:5-6

5 *The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”*

6 *He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.*

It is in the context of forgiveness that the disciples react by asking “Increase our faith!” The request implies that they understood that faith was needed in order to be able to extend forgiveness for repeated offenses. The object of faith is not mentioned here. What they meant was, probably, that it was difficult for them to comprehend the extent of God’s forgiveness. We must remember that this conversation took place before Jesus’ death on the cross. The disciples had not seen how far God was willing to go in forgiving the sins of mankind.

⁵⁷⁰ Ps. 51:5

⁵⁷¹ Matt. 18:23-35

⁵⁷² Mic. 7:19

⁵⁷³ Matt. 18:22

Barnes' Notes observes, appropriately: “The duty of forgiving offences is one of the most difficult duties of the Christian religion. It is so contrary to our natural feelings; it implies such elevation above the petty feelings of malice and revenge, and is so contrary to the received maxims of the world, which teach us to ‘cherish’ rather than to forgive the memory of offences, that it is no wonder our Savior dwells much on this duty, and so strenuously insists on it in order to our having evidence that our hearts have been changed.”

And *Matthew Henry's Commentary* states that while “the giving of offences is a great sin,” “the forgiving of offences is a great duty.”

Jesus gives them the same answer He had given them in connection with the healing of the demon possessed boy. The disciples had not been able to exorcise the demon and Jesus had told them: “I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”⁵⁷⁴ Forgiving people is about as difficult for us as moving a mountain. Without God’s help it cannot be done.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “They evidently felt their weakness deeply, but a stronger faith would supply them with new strength; they would thus be guided to form a wiser, gentler judgment of others, a more severe opinion too of themselves.”

3. Unprofitable servants 17:7-10

7 *“Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’?”*

8 *“Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’?”*

9 *“Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?”*

10 *“So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”*

Our Western culture does not give us the dimensions necessary to understand what Jesus is saying here. The context of the text is the kind of slavery that would no longer be acceptable in our day. The “servant” here is the slave who was bought with the master’s money, who had not right to privacy.

Actually, the parable does not fit God’s economy either. In *John's Gospel*, Jesus says to His disciples: “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”⁵⁷⁵ The point of the story is not how God considers us, but how we ought to see ourselves in our relationship with God.

Maybe the disciples asked for more than they could themselves understand. They asked for a measure of surrender that they could not bring up. We are all from birth endowed with the rebellious nature we inherited from Adam. Only the Holy Spirit can produce in us the unconditional surrender that makes us consider ourselves “unworthy servants.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “*Unworthy (achreioi)* is a difficult word, but it seems to mean ‘not yielding gain’ (cf. its use of the man who hid his talent, Matt. 25:30). Our best service does not bring gain to God and give us a claim on him (cf. I Cor. 9:16).”

Oswald Chambers writes: “Abandonment is not for anything at all. We have God so commercialized that we only go to God for something from Him, and not for Himself. It is like saying, ‘No, Lord, I don’t want Thee, I want myself; but I want myself clean and filled with the Holy Ghost; I want to be put in Thy showroom and be able to say – ‘This is what God has done for me.’ If we only give up something to God because we want more back, there is nothing of the Holy Spirit in our abandonment; it is miserable commercial self-interest. That we gain heaven, that we are delivered from sin, that we are made useful to God – these things never enter as considerations into real abandonment, which is a personal sovereign preference for Jesus Christ Himself.”

⁵⁷⁴ Matt. 17:20

⁵⁷⁵ John 15:15

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “A small measure of *real* faith was sufficient to teach them that God would give them strength enough to keep themselves from committing this offence against love and charity of which he warned them so solemnly; but they prayed for more. They were asking for faith, not only in a measure sufficient for obedience, but for a faith which would exclude all uncertainty and doubt. They were looking for the crown of labor *before* their work was done, for the wreath of the conqueror *before* they had fought the battle... In other words, the ‘increase of faith’ ‘for which the apostles prayed was only to come through obedience to their Master’s will.”

Yet, there is more in our obedience to the will of God than meets the eye. Jesus makes the amazing statement in John’s Gospel: “My Father will honor the one who serves me.”⁵⁷⁶ If we see ourselves as laying our crowns before God’s throne,⁵⁷⁷ we must not forget either that the crown was given to us by God in recognition of our slave labor for Him.

We must always remember that what we do for God is in response to our salvation. We were all bound for hell and an eternity of separation from God. He brought our dead spirits back to life and restored us into intimacy with Himself. Nothing we do can ever be considered sufficient payment for the price He paid for our salvation. Being an “unworthy servant” means that our balance in God’s books will always be in the red.

B. The ten lepers 17:11-19

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance

13 and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

14 When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

16 He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him — and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?”

18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”

19 Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

Again, Bible scholars have problems with the chronology of Luke’s narrative at this point. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “It is not easy to see why Jesus should have been passing along between Samaria and Galilee at this stage of the narrative ... The words describe a journey in the border area between the two provinces. AV has ‘through the midst of Samaria and Galilee,’ but this order point to a journey in a northerly direction, whereas Jesus appears to be going the other way. The problem is posed by the fact that he seems to have reached Perea before this time. It may be that Luke is not placing everything in chronological sequence and that the story is that of an incident that took place earlier. Alternatively after a journey through Perea Jesus went back to this area again.”

Lepers were not allowed to enter a village or town. The Mosaic law stated: “The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.”⁵⁷⁸

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states about leprosy: “The disease is a zymotic affection produced by a microbe discovered by Hansen in 1871. It is contagious, although not very readily communicated by casual contact; in one form it is attended with anaesthesia of the parts affected, and this, which is the commonest variety now met with in the East, is slower in its course than those forms in which nodular growths are the most prominent features, in which parts of the limbs often drop off.”

⁵⁷⁶ John 12:26

⁵⁷⁷ Rev. 4:10

⁵⁷⁸ Lev. 13:45,46

Although the law provided a cleansing ceremony for lepers that were healed, no instances of complete healing of Israelites are recorded in the Old Testament.⁵⁷⁹ The only time a leper could be pronounced “clean” by a priest was when the disease had run its course and covered the whole body.⁵⁸⁰ It is most unlikely that any priest would ever have carried out the prescribed cleansing ritual for anyone who had been diagnosed with leprosy and afterward had been healed. Jesus made it a point in the healing of lepers to tell them to go to the priest “as a testimony to them.”⁵⁸¹

Ten lepers saw Jesus passing and called out to Him, shouting: “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” The Greek word used is *epistates*, “master,” which is only used in Luke’s Gospel. Their cry would later make its way into the Latin of the mass: “Kyrie Eleison!” To this Jesus responded by saying: “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” It was as they obeyed that they were healed.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “He does not seem to have touched them, or *talked* with them, but with an impressive majesty bids them go and return thanks for their cure, which his will had already accomplished. They evidently believed implicitly in his healing power, for without further question they went on their way as he had commanded, and as they went the poor sufferers felt a new and, to them, a quite strange thrill of health course through their veins; they felt their prayer was granted, and that the fell disease had left them. They were not sent to the capital city; any priest in any town was qualified to pronounce on the completeness of a cure in this malady (... Leviticus 14:2-32).”

The cleansing ceremony involved two birds, one of which was killed and the blood was poured into a vessel containing spring water. The second bird was dipped into the blood of the other bird and released to fly away. This symbolized death and resurrection. The healed leper was sprinkled with this mixture. It was one of the most meaningful rituals in the Old Testament.

All ten experienced instantaneous healing as they started out on their way to find a priest who could certify their healing and perform the cleansing ceremony. Only one responded by returning to Jesus and thanking Him. Jesus reacted to this by voicing His disappointment over the other men in the group and by stating that his healing was the result of his faith in God’s power. Evidently, all ten lepers demonstrated faith, but only one showed gratitude. And that man was not even an Israelite who could claim the blessings of God’s covenant with Abraham.

Barnes’ Notes comments: “With what singular propriety may this question now be asked, ‘Where are the nine?’ And what a striking illustration is this of human nature, and of the ingratitude of man! One had come back to give thanks for the favor bestowed on him; the others were heard of no more. So now. When people are restored from dangerous sickness, here and there one comes to give thanks to God; but ‘where are the nine?’ When people are defended from danger; when they are recovered from the perils of the sea; when a steamboat is destroyed, and a large part of crew and passengers perish, here and there one of those who are saved acknowledges the goodness of God and renders him praise; but where is the mass of them? They give no thanks; they offer no praise. They go about their usual employments, to mingle in the scenes of pleasure and of sin as if nothing had occurred. Few, few of all who have been rescued from ‘threatening graves’ feel their obligation to God, or ever express it. They forget their Great Benefactor; perhaps the mention of his name is unpleasant, and they scorn the idea that they are under any obligations to him. Such, alas! is man, ungrateful man!”

Before this Samaritan submitted to the ritual that exemplified the death and resurrection of the Messiah, to the shadow of the reality, he went to Him who is the reality that gave meaning and content to the ceremony. This man cannot have understood the meaning of this, but his faith made him do the right thing.

Jesus tells the leper, who had bowed down in the dust, to rise. The Greek word use is *anistemi* which has the general meaning “to stand up.” The same verb is used in connection with Jesus own resurrection. In announcing the upcoming events of His death and resurrection, Jesus used the same word, saying: “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

⁵⁷⁹ Luke 4:27

⁵⁸⁰ Lev. 13:12,13

⁵⁸¹ Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14

He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will *rise again*.⁵⁸²

In submitting to the cleansing ritual the law had prescribed, the man would experience the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection. The emphasis in Jesus' word is on the fact that the healing of this leper was the result of his own faith, more than upon the power of Christ.

Although this Samaritan could not claim the blessing God had reserved for the people of His covenant with Israel, he was allowed to eat the crumbs that fell under the table.⁵⁸³

C. The coming of the kingdom 17:20-37

20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,

21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

22 Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it.

23 Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them.

24 For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.

25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

26 "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

27 People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

28 "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.

29 But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

30 "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

31 On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything.

32 Remember Lot's wife!

33 Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

34 I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left.

35 Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left."

37 "Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

We notice that v.36 is conspicuously absent from the NIV text. A footnote states: "Some manuscripts left. [36] Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left."

The occasion of Jesus' words in vv. 20 and 21 was a question by one or more of the Pharisees about the coming of the kingdom of God. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: "The Pharisees may have asked their questions out of a genuine interest in the subject. Or, since they knew Jesus often spoke of the kingdom, they may have been interested in his view on the point. Jesus makes it clear that the kingdom is unlike any kingdom with which the Pharisees were familiar. Its coming cannot be observed. It is *in the midst of you* (*entos hymōn*), an expression for which a number meanings have been suggested. *a.* The kingdom is essentially inward ('in your hearts'). But this would be unparalleled in the Gospels (though Rom 14:17). *b.* The words prophesy the way the kingdom will come: 'The kingdom will suddenly appear among you.' This

⁵⁸² Luke 18:31-33

⁵⁸³ Matt. 15:26,27

is possible, but if so, the words bear a somewhat unnatural sense. *c.* The kingdom is ‘within your reach,’ i.e. it is attainable if you go the right way about it. But Jesus usually regards the kingdom as God’s gift, not man’s attainment. *d.* The kingdom is ‘among you,’ i.e. it is present in the Person and ministry of Jesus. This seems the way the words should be taken.”

The phrase “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,” raises some questions that are difficult to explain. The Greek word rendered “observation” is *parateresis* which means “inspection,” or “ocular evidence.” This is the only place in The New Testament, where this word occurs. Maybe, we could say that God’s Kingdom can not be analyzed scientifically. There are some things that cannot be proven by scientific research, but they are yet part of human experience.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary explains: “The Jews imagined that when the Messiah should come he would destroy the Gentiles, and reign gloriously over the Jews: the very reverse of this, our Lord intimates, should be the case. He was about to destroy the whole Jewish polity, and reign gloriously among the Gentiles. Hence, he mentions the case of the general deluge, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. As if he had said: ‘The coming of this kingdom shall be as fatal to you as the deluge was to the old world, and as the fire and brimstone from heaven were to Sodom and Gomorrah.’ Our Lord states that this kingdom of heaven was within them, i.e. that they themselves should be the scene of these desolations as, through their disobedience and rebellion, they possessed the seeds of these judgments.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary adds: “A kingdom is not just a territory, nor a system of governmental machinery. Its basic existence is in the unity and loyalty of a people. Jesus asserted that the kingdom of God was already present and needed only to be recognized. He had brought the kingdom with him and was living among them.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The query was certainly not put in a friendly spirit. The questioners had evidently caught the drift of much of our Lord’s late teaching, and had seen how plainly he was alluding to himself as Messiah. This seems to have been the starting point of their bitter, impatient inquiry. We must remember that the great rabbinic schools in which these Pharisees had received their training connected the coming of Messiah with a grand revival of Jewish power. If in reality this Galilaean Rabbi, with his strange powers, his new doctrines, his scathing words of reproach which he was ever presuming to address to the leaders in Israel, — if in reality he were Messiah, when was that golden age, which the long looked-for Hope of Israel was to introduce, to commence? But the words, we can well conceive, were spoken with the bitterest irony. With what scorn those proud, rich men from Jerusalem looked on the friendless Teacher of Galilee, we know. We seem to hear the muttering which accompanied the question: ‘Thou our King Messiah!’ The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. This answer of our Lord’s may be paraphrased: ‘The kingdom of God cometh not in conjunction with such observation and watching for external glorious things as now exist among you here. Lo, it will burst upon you suddenly, unawares.’ The English word *observation* answers to the signification of the Greek as meaning a singularly anxious watching.”

The Kingdom of God exists wherever God is king. Any person who has surrendered his own will to the will of God becomes, by that very act, an ambassador of the kingdom. The Apostle Paul defines well what the kingdom will look like. We read: “God exalted [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”⁵⁸⁴

The phrase “the kingdom of God is within you” would be easier understood if the Greek word *entos* were rendered “among” instead of “within.” Jesus used the same word in the context of His reproach to the Pharisees, saying: “Blind Pharisee! First clean the *inside* of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.”⁵⁸⁵ Jesus was not only the ambassador of the Kingdom, He is the Kingdom!

The rest of this chapter is about what Jesus said to His disciples. It appears that in Jesus’ answer there are two phases of the Kingdom mentioned. The first part is that Jesus is the Kingdom.

⁵⁸⁴ Phil. 2:9-11

⁵⁸⁵ Matt. 23:26

As He would go to the cross to die, He took the Kingdom with Him in His death and resurrection. The disciples, who would long to see the Kingdom, would be unable to grasp the meaning of the abolishment of the Kingdom. It would seem to them that the Kingdom was gone forever when Jesus died on the cross. The Gospels record about the disciples' reaction to the cross would be defeat and despair. They would not be able to see the Kingdom because it had been buried in the tomb where Jesus' body was placed.

Jesus' words in the following verses 23-37 did not apply to the immediate events but to the Second Coming. Jesus issued a warning about the coming of the Antichrist, who will proclaim to be the returned Messiah. That seems to be the meaning of "Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them." The revelation of the Kingdom will be at the time of Jesus' return at the last day of the world's history. Nature will testify to the reality by means of a worldwide thunderstorm and light flashing from one end to the other, covering the whole of our planet. Before that would happen, Jesus must first suffer and die on the cross.

After His death and resurrection there would be Jesus' ascension. He would go to heaven to prepare a place for those who believe in Him.

On the evening of His betrayal, Jesus said to His disciples in the upper room: "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."⁵⁸⁶

Jesus compared His Second Coming to the time before the flood, when Noah built the ark. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: "Till the Son of man comes life will continue normally. It will all be like the times of Noah. Noah's contemporaries were sinful people, but it is not this that Jesus stresses. There is nothing sinful about the activities he lists; they are the stuff of ordinary human life. But that is just the point. Those people of old were so taken up in the ordinary affairs of this life that they took no notice of Noah. The result was that they were overtaken in the destruction they might have avoided."

From the time of Noah, Jesus moved to the event that occurred centuries later, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Some Bible scholars see in Jesus' words a reference to the rapture of the church. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: "Both in the case of Noah and in the case of Lot (see v. 29), God's people were taken away from the scene of judgment before it occurred."

Barnes' Notes observes about the "fire and sulfur that destroyed the cities": "God destroyed Sodom on account of its great wickedness. He took vengeance on it for its sins; and the example of Sodom is set before people to deter them from committing great transgressions, and as a 'full proof' that God will punish the guilty. See Jude 7; also Isa 1:10; Jer 23:14. Yet, in overthrowing it, he used natural means. He is not to be supposed to have 'created' fire and brimstone for the occasion, but to have 'directed' the natural means at his disposal for their overthrow; as he did not 'create' the waters to drown the world, but merely broke up the fountains of the great deep and opened the windows of heaven. Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim (Deut 29:23), were four great cities, on a plain where is now the Dead Sea, at the southeast of Palestine, and into which the river Jordan flows. They were built on ground which abounded, doubtless, as all that region now does, in 'bitumen or naphtha,' which is easily kindled, and which burns with great intensity. The phrase 'fire and brimstone' is a Hebrew form of expression, denoting sulphurous fire, or fire having the smell of sulphur; and may denote a volcanic eruption, or any burning like that of naphtha. There is no improbability in supposing either that this destruction was accomplished by lightning, which ignited the naphtha, or that it was a volcanic eruption, which, by direction of God, overthrew the wicked cities."

In connection with the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Jesus speaks of "the days of Lot." We would have expected that He would have referred to Abraham, rather than to Lot.

In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said that a person has to experience a new birth in order to see the kingdom and enter it.⁵⁸⁷ And when Pilate interrogated Jesus, He said: "My kingdom is not of this

⁵⁸⁶ John 14:2-4

⁵⁸⁷ John 3:3,5

world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”⁵⁸⁸

The Jews anticipated the restoration of an earthly kingdom. They expected the kingdom of David, of which Jehoiakin was the last king, and that ended at the Babylonian occupation, would be restored. They could never visualize a kingdom that would not be “of this world.” What they could not understand was that the kingdom, in which David had ruled, represented an earthly image of a spiritual reality. The Kingdom of God is the kingdom of heaven.

At the Second Coming Jesus would inaugurate the kingdom of heaven, not the earthly kingdom. Jeremiah had prophesied that the kingdom of Israel would never again have a member of the line of David to rule over them. We read: “O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Lord says: ‘Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.’”

The angel Gabriel said to Mary: “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”⁵⁸⁹ The King of the kingdom of heaven was born on earth. Nothing on earth lasts forever. The only possibility for Jesus to be the king of the heavenly kingdom was by means of His death and resurrection.

In answer to the Pharisees’ question, Jesus answered: “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” The best way to interpret this statement may be in seeing it as the same answer Jesus gave to Nicodemus. The kingdom of heaven is not visible for those who have not gone through the new birth. Only born again people can see and enter the kingdom. And when they enter the kingdom, the kingdom will enter their life.

When we compare Luke’s statement about the Second Coming with the reports of the same in Matthew and Mark, we conclude that Jesus spoke of the time of the Antichrist. Both Matthew and Mark refer to “the abomination that causes desolation.”⁵⁹⁰

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “The Lord, with this striking imagery, describes, not the attitude which men who would be saved must assume when he appears with power and great glory — there will be no time then to shape any new way of life — but it pictures the attitude they must always maintain, if they would be his servants, towards the things of this world. His servants must be ready to abandon all earthly blessings at a moment’s notice; none but those who have been sitting loosely to these will be able, when the sudden cry comes, at once to toss away all, and so to meet the long-tarrying Bridegroom. The reminder of Lot’s wife — a very familiar story to Jews — warned all would-be disciples of the danger of the double service, God and the world, and how likely the one who attempted it would be to perish miserably.”

The Apostle Paul expected the Second Coming in his own lifetime. He wrote to the church in Corinth: “What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.”⁵⁹¹

Jesus uses two example of how people might react to the moment of His Second Coming. The man on the roof, probably, represents relaxation; the man in the field stands for labor. When the lightning of His coming flashes from one end of the sky to the other, there will be no time to do anything. It will be too late to prepare. Only those who have lived a life of anticipation of His coming will be able to welcome Him; for all others it will be too late.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “When that day comes the situation will be urgent. Jesus brings this out by speaking of the two things people might be tempted to do. A man on a housetop might think of saving something from his house; a man in the field might turn back for a similar reason. These are natural and

⁵⁸⁸ John 18:36

⁵⁸⁹ Luke 1:32,33

⁵⁹⁰ Matt 24:15-16; Mark 13:14

⁵⁹¹ I Cor. 7:29-31

harmless acts, but in the day of the Son of man this kind of thing will have no place. Then people must give their whole attention to the Son of man, not to their goods. The equivalent words in Matthew and Mark refer to flight at the fall of Jerusalem and some scholars hold that Luke has taken the saying out of its context and applied it to a situation where flight is impossible. But surely Luke was intelligent enough to see that! It is much better to hold that, whether Jesus uttered the word on more than one occasion or whether Luke is correctly applying them to another situation, they really do apply to the day when the Son of man comes. They inculcate a whole-hearted devotion to the Son of man uncomplicated by a desire for material possessions.”

We read in Genesis that Lot and his family fled Sodom before its destruction. They all arrived safely at their place of refuge, except for Lot’s wife. “But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.”⁵⁹² Maybe the lady did more than just look over her shoulder; it could be that she turned around and went back to retrieve some of the things she had left behind. Jesus uses her as an example of one who loses life physically, to emphasize that the real danger is to lose one’s spiritual life. Only those who do not love their lives so much as to shrink from death⁵⁹³ will be victorious over Satan and all his evil.

Jesus uses two examples of separation between those who are ready and those who are not. One is a scene at night, the other is at daytime. The two people in one bed are probably husband and wife; the two women grinding grain work during the day. Of the two one is taken and the other left. *The Pulpit Commentary* asks: “How taken? Not, as some scholars have supposed, *taken only to perish*, but taken away by the Lord in the way described by St. Paul in ... 1 Thessalonians 4:17, where he paints how the faithful servant who is living when the Lord returns in glory, will be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. The *other* will be left. Thus, as it has been strikingly observed, ‘the beings who have been most closely connected here below shall, in the twinkling of an eye, be parted for ever.’”

The NIV omits v.36, which can be found in the KJV and NKJV: “Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on the missing verse: “Ver. 36 is wanting in nearly all the oldest authorities. It was subsequently inserted in this place by copyists from ... Matthew 24:40 — a passage in which much of the imagery here used was repeated by the Master. In one important feature this discourse differs from that delivered at Jerusalem a little later, and reported at length by St. Matthew in his twenty-fourth chapter. There is no reference here (in St. Luke) to the siege of Jerusalem; the whole teaching is purely teleological, and deals exclusively with what will take place at the close of this age.”

In answer to the disciples’ question about those left behind, the Lord depicts a battlefield after the war is over. Dead bodies are left behind and birds of prey descend upon them. Most Bible scholars believe that Jesus uses a proverb. The scene is one of corruption. Dead bodies are supposed to be buried, but evidently there is not enough time or manpower to clear the field.

The scene is one of judgment. The Apostle John uses similar language in Revelation to depict God’s final judgment. We read: “And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, ‘Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.’ The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.”⁵⁹⁴

D. Two parables about prayer 18:1-14

1. The unjust judge 18:1-8

1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

2 He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men.

3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

⁵⁹² Gen. 19:26

⁵⁹³ Rev. 12:11

⁵⁹⁴ Rev. 19:17,18,21

4 “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men,

5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’”

6 And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says.

7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?

8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers who records this parable. Most Bible scholars believe that it is meant to illustrate the topic of the previous chapter regarding the Second Coming. The delay of Jesus’ return to earth at the end of time would make people believe that the event will never occur. The Apostle Peter comments on this in his second epistle, saying: “First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’”⁵⁹⁵

The Pulpit Commentary comments on this section: “The forlorn woman of the parable represents the Church or people of God in dire straits, overborne by an unbelieving world and seemingly forgotten even of their God. The story is a reminder that there is hope even in that extreme situation sketched in the parable, if the petitioner only continues persistent in her prayer. The argument which lies on the surface of the parable’s teaching is obvious: if such a judge will in the end listen to the prayer of a suppliant for whom he cares nothing, will not God surely listen to the repeated prayer of a suppliant whom he loves with a deep, enduring love?”

Obviously, the comparison between the crooked judge and God does not suggest that God would be crooked or unjust. The point of the parable is best shown in the statement Jesus made earlier: “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”⁵⁹⁶

The point of the parable is, first of all, that prayer must be persistent and well focused. Yet, most of us rarely pray for the return of Christ to earth. The prayer that concludes the New Testament: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus,”⁵⁹⁷ is seldom heard in the church. Most of us believe that Jesus will return whether we pray about it or not. We find it hard to believe that God would make the execution of His plans dependant upon our prayers and that certain promised events will not happen when we do not pray about them. But then the question is why the Lord taught us to pray: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven?”⁵⁹⁸

Another point is that if we do not pray for Jesus’ return, we will not be ready for it either. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments correctly: “Readiness for his return will be conditioned by prayer.”

One of our problems is that we fail to see that the world in which we live is not the one God intended when He created heaven, earth and mankind. The Apostle Paul describes clearly what our present situation is like: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁵ II Peter 3:3,4

⁵⁹⁶ Matt. 7:11; Luke 11:11

⁵⁹⁷ Rev. 22:20

⁵⁹⁸ Matt. 6:10

⁵⁹⁹ Rom. 8:19-23

Much more is at stake than our personal salvation. It is important for us to understand that our redemption is part of the renewal of the whole universe. How important it is that we pray “Your kingdom come,” and “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

The widow’s petition to the judge was “Grant me justice against my adversary.” The Greek verb used is *ekdikeo*, which literally means “avenge.” We find it in the verse: “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”⁶⁰⁰ We are not given the details of her problem. Being a widow, some people in authority probably were taking advantage of her situation in which she found herself unable to defend herself. Jesus accused the Pharisees of doing this, saying: “They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers.”⁶⁰¹

The parable also depicts a corrupt judicial system. The judge was probably someone who only took on cases in which he was given a bribe. Since the widow was unable to come up with the money, he ignored her plea. God cannot and need not to be bribed to hear our prayers.

Jesus also gives no details about injustice experienced by God’s “chosen ones.” We think of John’s statement about our position in the world: “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”⁶⁰² All the details of hardship of the Christian life can be traced to that basic condition. In some situation Christians are persecuted openly, but even if this is not the case, those who believe in Jesus and live a life that is according to the will of God will find themselves under all kinds of pressure and hardships.

The question “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” is not an expression of doubt, but of encouragement. We can be sure that Satan will not have the last word in world history.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “These difficult words seem to point at least to a fear lest, the second coming being long delayed, true faith would have died out of the hearts even of the godly. Such a *fear* might be Jesus’; for we know, from his own lips, that to him, while on earth and wearing the body of humiliation, the day and hour of the second advent was not known. Was not our Lord speaking with the same sad onlook in his parable of the virgins, when he said, ‘they *all* slumbered and slept,’ wise virgins as well as foolish (... Matthew 25:5)? ‘It is often the case that God’s action as a Deliverer is delayed until his people have ceased to hope for deliverance. So it was with Israel in Egypt; so was it with her again in Babylon. ‘Grief was calm and hope was dead’” among the exiles when the word came that they were to return to their own land; and then the news seemed too good to be true. They were ‘like them that dream’ when they heard the good tidings. This method of Divine action — long delay followed by a sudden crisis — so frankly recognized by Christ, is one to which we find it hard to reconcile ourselves. These parables help us so far, but they do not settle everything. They contain no philosophy of Divine delay, but simply a proclamation of the fact, and an assurance that, in spite of delay, all will go well at the last with those who trust in God.”

2. The Pharisee and the publican 18:9-14

9 *To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:*

10 *“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.*

11 *The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector.*

12 *I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’*

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

14 *“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

⁶⁰⁰ Rom. 12:19

⁶⁰¹ Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47

⁶⁰² I John 5:19

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “The second parable brings out the spirit in which people should pray. It is also an emphatic repudiation of any suggestion that anyone can be saved by acquiring merit. What the Pharisee said about himself was true. His trouble was not that he was not far enough along the road, but that he was on the wrong road altogether.”

The Pharisees’ main problem was that he compared himself to the wrong person. If we use our fellowmen as a mirror in which we can see ourselves, we can choose our own mirror and we will always look good. The criterion on the Day of Judgment will not be how well we did in comparison with other people, but that we have fallen short of the glory of God.

The Pharisee gave God some credit for his status in life. He thanked God for who he was, but he made it clear that it was his own initiative that made him “pleasing” to God. There were some sins he had not committed, but his pride put him at the wrong side of the scale. Ironically, his sin was his “righteousness.” Now we can thank God for our righteousness as long as we realize that the righteousness that makes us acceptable to Him is not our own, but Christ’s. The Apostle Paul writes about this: “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”⁶⁰³

The publican merely asked God to have mercy on him. The Greek word used is *hilaskomai*, which actually refers to atonement. We find the same word used in the verse: “For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make *atonement* for the sins of the people.”⁶⁰⁴

We understand that both the Pharisee and the publican had brought a sacrifice to the temple. While they prayed, the sacrifice was burning on the altar. The publican said to God that he identified with the animal that had died in his place and was being offered to God. He confessed that he merited death and asked God to be satisfied with the substitution. The Pharisee had also brought an offer, but he told God that he had no reason to identify with the sacrificial animal, since he had done so well morally that God ought to be satisfied with him without it.

The Greek word translated “be merciful” is *hilaskomai*, meaning “to conciliate,” or “to atone for sin.” The word is related to the Greek noun used for the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, *hilasteérion*. The Apostle Paul uses the word in the verse: “God presented [Jesus] as a *sacrifice of atonement*, through faith in his blood.”⁶⁰⁵

Jesus says that the publican “went home *justified* before God.” The Greek word used is *dikaioo*, which in this context means: “to regard as just.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on the word: “This is the one passage in the Third Gospel where this word has a theological meaning. Luke may have drawn it from the Pauline theology (Acts 13:39; Rom 3:23-26), with which he was quite familiar. It means to reckon as righteous rather than to be righteous. Because of his trust in the sacrifice and his confession of sin, the publican was accepted as right in the sight of God.”

Jesus says that the person who humbles himself before God will be exalted. God, not only lifts up those who bow down before Him, but He gives them honor and glory. If we identify with Jesus Christ in His suffering and death, we will be identified with Him also in His resurrection and glory.

E. Jesus and the children 18:15-17

15 People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them.

16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

17 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

⁶⁰³ Rom. 3:22-24

⁶⁰⁴ Heb. 2:17

⁶⁰⁵ Rom. 3:25

The NIV reads that people brought their “babies” to Jesus. The Greek word used is *brephos*, which has a rather wide range of meaning from “unborn” to “young child.” We find it used in the verse: “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb.”⁶⁰⁶ And in “You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”⁶⁰⁷ And Paul uses it in his letter to Timothy, saying: “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from *infancy* you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”⁶⁰⁸

And obviously, Jesus would not call babies to Himself, as we read in the next verse. The word used there is *paidion*, which refers to a young child, still in the process of growing up.

In Matthew’s version of the incident we read that the parents brought their little children to Jesus “for him to place his hands on them and pray for them.”⁶⁰⁹ And Mark states that “He took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.”⁶¹⁰ The scene was like the dedication of infants as we practice it in our church services at present.

We do not read why the disciples tried to stop parents from doing this. They may have thought that Jesus was too busy, or too important to spend time doing this, or they failed to understand the importance of spiritual experiences early in life. They rebuked the parents, actually forbidden them to do this. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “It is plain from our Lord’s reply, that they thought the intrusion a useless one, since infants were not capable of receiving anything from Him—His ministrations were for grown people.”

Jesus reacted to this by not only overruling them, but by stating that the Kingdom of God is particularly for young people.

It is a fact that most people, who experience conversion and regeneration, generally do so in their youth when they are most susceptible to outward influences. It seems that, as we grow older, we find it harder to change. The psalmist states specifically: “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.”⁶¹¹

Jesus states that the Kingdom “belongs” to children. Some people have concluded from this statement that, when a child dies even before the age in which he can make a conscious choice to dedicate his life to God, he will go to heaven. It may be difficult to prove or disprove this on the basis of this statement. We may assume that God will not allow the enemy to take what is not his.

Jesus uses the mindset of youth as a model for entering the Kingdom, evidently, regardless of age. It is obviously to adults that He said that the Kingdom could only be received and entered in the spirit of a young child. Some people have interpreted this as meaning that one has to be humble to enter. Although humility is a requirement, we cannot say that it is a feature that sets young people apart. What characterizes childhood is dependence. A child knows that it cannot survive without parental help and protection. Even in the bragging stages of childhood, a kid will say that his daddy is stronger or bigger than the other one’s daddy. The mentality that allows us to enter the kingdom at any age is the recognition of God as “the Father.”

F. The rich young ruler 18:18-30

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

19 *“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good — except God alone.*

20 *You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’ ”*

⁶⁰⁶ Luke 1:41

⁶⁰⁷ Luke 2:12

⁶⁰⁸ II Tim. 3:14,15

⁶⁰⁹ Matt. 19:13,14

⁶¹⁰ Mark 10:16

⁶¹¹ Ps. 119:9

21 *“All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said.*

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

23 *When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth.*

24 *Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!*

25 *Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”*

26 *Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”*

27 *Jesus replied, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.”*

28 *Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!”*

29 *“I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God*

30 *will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.”*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states about the person who came to Jesus: “Luke alone tells us that this man was a ruler. The term is a very general one and denotes Roman and Jewish officials of all kinds ... We cannot be specific about his office and suggest for example that he was a ruler of the synagogue (in any case, as Matthew tells us that he was young, this is unlikely). But at least he was among to ruling classes.”

Bible scholars have argued about that fact that this man was young and yet in a position of power. Some suggest that his obvious wealth may have bought him a place in a council that would normally be reserved for older persons.

In all of the three versions of this encounter, as we find it in Matthew and Mark also, it is stated that the young man used the word “good” liberally. He called Jesus “good” and also referred to acts that would assure access into the Kingdom as “good.”⁶¹²

It sounds strange to us that Jesus seemingly repudiated the term “good” as applied to Himself. Elsewhere, He said to the Jews: “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?”⁶¹³ Jesus’ disclaimer does not seem to be meant as a confession of sin, but as a correction of the young man’s concept of God’s perfection. He seemed to have believed that somehow his good acts could buy him his way into heaven. He had, evidently, not come to the understanding that sin meant falling short of the glory of God. We may assume that he used the word “good” more as a polite compliment than anything else. To believe that his address meant a denial of Christ’s divinity, as some assume, may be pushing the point too far.

Jesus’ reply “No one is good — except God alone” implies that God demands perfection, which is what no creature can produce.⁶¹⁴

In His reply Jesus mentions five of the Ten Commandments, most of which are taken from the Second Tablet, referring to inter-human relationships, rather than relationship with God. Four of the five refer to sins not committed; only honoring father and mother refers to acts committed. The young man replies, rather glibly, that he had obeyed them all, all his life.

In the advice Jesus gives him to sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor, He puts His finger on the lack of love that had been this young man’s problem. Ultimately, our relationship with God is defined as loving God “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,” and loving “our neighbor as ourselves.”⁶¹⁵ Eternal life is a bonus, not a reward for good living.

⁶¹² Matt. 19:16; Mark 10:17

⁶¹³ John 8:42

⁶¹⁴ Matt. 5:47; Lev. 11:44

⁶¹⁵ Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18

The “one thing” still lacking in this man’s life was the only important one: eternal life! He had everything needed for this life, but none for life to come. It is obvious that selling one’s possessions does not provide eternal life. Nothing we do can buy it; it is a gift of God by grace.

We can only assume that the young man’s possessions prevented him from putting his trust exclusively in God. Love of money is often a substitute for security that can only be found in fellowship with God. The author of Hebrews put this most clearly in his statement: “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’”⁶¹⁶ The young man must have told himself that he did not need to trust God because he had the means to buy what he wanted. He had disregarded the wisdom of Agur son of Jakeh, who had said: “Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’”⁶¹⁷ There is a price to be paid for eternal life, but the assets are negative. It means getting rid of all that prevents us from receiving what God wants to give us for free.

The amazing thing is that that which we give up for the Lord’s sake is put as a credit on our heavenly account. The proverb states: “You can’t take it with you!” Jesus says: “You can send it ahead.”

In Mark’s Gospel we read Jesus’ reaction to the young man’s inner struggle: “Jesus looked at him and loved him.”⁶¹⁸

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about the young man’s reaction: “Luke does not actually say that the young man refused, only that he *became sad*. But the refusal to rise to the challenge is implied. Jesus went on to point out that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom. The affluent are always tempted to rely on things earthly and they do not find it easy to cast themselves on the mercy of God.”

Actually, it is not only hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. As Jesus pointed out to Nicodemus, it takes a total spiritual renewal, a new birth, in order to enter.⁶¹⁹

Jesus’ picture of a camel going through the eye of a needle has given reason to various efforts to explain the parable.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “This simile, taken in its plain and obvious sense, appears to many an exaggerated one, and various explanations have been suggested to soften it down. The best is found in Lord Nugent’s ‘Lands Classical and Sacred,’ who mentions that in some modern Syrian towns the narrow gate for foot-passengers at the side of the larger gate by which wagons, camels, and other beasts of burden enter the city, is known as the ‘needle’s eye.’ It is, however, very uncertain whether this term for the little gate was known in ancient times. But the simile was evidently a common one among the Jews. The Talmud, for instance, gives us the parallel phrase of an elephant passing through a needle’s eye.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary explains: “Luke uses the word for a surgical needle (Gr. *belones*). Attempts to explain this saying by a confusion between camel (Gr. *kamelos*) and cable (*kamilos*) or by a figurative use of the phrase to mean the small gate in a city wall have not been convincing. Jesus was using a current hyperbolic expression to show how difficult it would be for a man of wealth to accept discipleship with him and to enter the kingdom of God.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, evidently prefers to take Jesus’ words literally, commenting: “Attempts have been made to explain Jesus’ words about the *camel* and *the eye of a needle* in terms of a camel shuffling through a small postern gate, or by reading *kamilon* ‘cable’ for *kamēlon* ‘camel.’ Such ‘explanations’ are misguided. They miss the point that Jesus is using a humorous illustration.”

Whatever the literal meaning of the picture Jesus used, it is clear that He wanted to emphasize the extreme difficulty, if not impossibility, of someone entering the Kingdom of God on his own.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes about the comment “Who then can be saved?”: “According to Jewish thinking, prosperity was a sign of the favor of God for those who kept the Law (Deut 28:1-8). If a

⁶¹⁶ Heb. 13:5,6

⁶¹⁷ Prov. 30:8,9

⁶¹⁸ Mark 10:21

⁶¹⁹ John 3:3,5

man was rich, he must therefore be a good man. Christ's utterance was a shock to his disciples, because they were sure that a wealthy man must be righteous."

It is true that the Old Testament concept of blessing was usually expressed in an abundance of material things. The Jewish prayer "par excellence" was the prayer of Jabez.⁶²⁰ Jesus modeled for us what the essence of God's blessing to us is by coming into this world as a poor itinerant rabbi. The Apostle Paul described this in the words: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."⁶²¹

It is not so much how much we possess that forms a hindrance for entering the kingdom, but the way we possess it. Abraham's material possessions, for example, did not exclude him from the kingdom.

Jesus' audience understood that it was not just possessions but the difference between human sinful nature and God's holiness that was the problem for entering. Only the miracle of regeneration can condition us for the kingdom. It is God's promise, as given in Ezekiel that provides the answer. We read: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."⁶²² That is the miracle Jesus refers to here. No one would be saved if God did not do the saving.

We could assume that Peter's question was wrong and we would expect that Jesus would correct him. No one is saved because he has given up certain things to follow the Lord. A missionary who leaves home and goods to go to the end of the world to preach the Gospel is not saved because of his service. He serves because he is saved! But that does not seem to be the answer Jesus gives here to Peter. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: "Some take Jesus' reply as humorous: 'Whimsically Jesus promises that those who have left home and family for the service of the kingdom will find themselves caring for a far bigger family than the one they left.' Most, however, take the words to mean that God is not under obligation to anyone. If someone gives up anything for God he will be repaid manifold more in this time, to say nothing of eternal life in the coming age. It would be quite out of harmony with the whole passage to understand these words to mean that people may follow Jesus with a view to worldly benefits. If gain is their motive they have not begun to understand what discipleship means. They must renounce all worldly things. But that does not mean that God will bless them grudgingly. Where there is the genuine spirit of self-sacrifice, there God supplies all his servant needs (cf. Phil 4:19)."

In Matthew's version of the incident we read Peter's questions as: "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"⁶²³ Following Jesus may have serious consequences upon our human relationships, both as far as family ties is concerned as well as wider human bonds of friendships and society. Often, however, we find that when family bonds are broken, we enter into a fellowship with fellow believers that, not only makes up for, but often, surpasses natural relationships.

Mark gives us the most complete version of Jesus' reply to Peter: "I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields — and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."⁶²⁴ But if recompense, either in this world or in heaven, is the reason for our following of Christ, we have not understood what it is all about. In some instances, persecution is the immediate result and remuneration may be far away.

G. Another prophecy of the passion 18:31-34

31 Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

32 He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him.

⁶²⁰ I Chron. 4:10

⁶²¹ II Cor. 8:9

⁶²² Ezek. 36:26,27

⁶²³ Matt. 19:27

⁶²⁴ Mark 10:29-31

33 On the third day he will rise again.”

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

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “This is often spoken of as Jesus’ third prediction of his suffering, but it is in fact the seventh that Luke records, following others in 5:35; 9:22, 43-45; 12:50; 13:32f.; 17:25.”

Luke picks up the theme of Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem, about which he had stated earlier that Jesus set out “resolutely.”⁶²⁵ The purpose of His going was evidently foremost in His mind and He voiced this to His disciples, saying that, everything the Old Testament prophets predicted about the Messiah, would happen to Him. The prophecies Jesus referred to were mainly the ones by Isaiah and Daniel.⁶²⁶ Some of David’s Messianic psalms could be mentioned also. This prediction about His suffering, death and resurrection is the most detailed and specific.

Somehow, even the best-versed Old Testament scholar of that day gave no serious consideration to those prophecies about the Messiah. It should not amaze us that those prophecies were totally lost on the disciples at this point. Their minds were full of the recompense that had been the topic of their discussion. The price to be paid was not under consideration. Jesus’ earlier statement, that He had come to give His life as a ransom,⁶²⁷ was not foremost in their minds.

The more detailed Jesus was in His description of what would happen to Him, the more stubborn were the disciples in failing to understand what He meant. Luke is very emphatic about this by repeating three times that they had no clue what Jesus was talking about. In saying “its meaning was hidden from them,” he seems to suggest that God purposely kept them from understanding. Only after the Holy Spirit came down upon them, they began to understand the meaning of the cross and the empty grave. Even for us, who can look back upon these events that mark the history of salvation, the wonder and mystery are not completely uncovered. We agree with Wesley’s statement: “amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!” Had the disciples understood, they would have been at Jesus’ grave on the Sunday morning of His resurrection to welcome their Lord back to life.

H. A blind man receives his sight

18:35-43

35 As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.

36 When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening.

37 They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”

38 He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

39 Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

40 Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him,

41 “What do you want me to do for you?” “Lord, I want to see,” he replied.

42 Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.”

43 Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

The healing of this blind man is recorded in all three of the synoptic Gospels. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: “Matthew speaks of two blind men being healed as Jesus went out of Jericho ... Mark has one blind man, whom he names as Bartimaeus, healed as Jesus went out of this city. Luke does not name the man and he locates the miracle at Jesus’ entry into the city. There is little doubt that all three refer to the same incident, but with our present information it may be impossible to give a satisfactory explanation of these differences. Some think there were two blind men of whom Bartimaeus was the more prominent or

⁶²⁵ Luke 9:51

⁶²⁶ Isa. 53; Dan. 9:25-27

⁶²⁷ Matt. 20:28

the better known in the church. It is also pointed out that there were two Jerichos, the old one, famous in the Old Testament, and the new one established nearby by Herod the Great. Some hold that the healing took place as Jesus was leaving one city and entering the other.”

There is no contradiction in the fact that Matthew records the healing of two blind men and Luke and Mark only mention one, or that one speaks of Jesus entering the city and the other of His leaving.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: “The differences between Luke’s narrative and those of Matthew (Matt 20:29-34) and Mark (Mark 10:46-52) have caused considerable argument. Luke says that the miracle took place as Jesus approached Jericho; Matthew and Mark say that it occurred as he left. Mark and Luke assert that one man was healed; Matthew mentions two men. Luke was probably speaking of the Gentile city of Jericho, built by Herod and situated some little distance from the site of the old Jericho that had been the Jewish city. Matthew and Mark had the old city in mind. In other words, the miracle took place between the Old and New Testament Jerichos. A writer could view the event as occurring after Jesus left the one town or before he reached the other.”

Two things are remarkable in this account. One is that Jesus is called by the crowd “Jesus of Nazareth,” and the other that Bartimaeus, as Mark calls him, called Jesus “Son of David,” acknowledging Him as the Messiah. At one occasion it was a demon who addressed Jesus as “Jesus of Nazareth.”⁶²⁸ And the girl who made Peter deny his Master said: “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.”⁶²⁹

Luke uses two different verbs for the blind man’s crying after Jesus. The first, *boao*, is a cry for help. We find it in the description of the ministry of John the Baptist as “A voice of one *calling* in the desert.”⁶³⁰ The second verb *krazo*, refers to a scream, which is what the demons did, crying: “What do you want with us, Son of God?”⁶³¹ For the blind man it was the desperation that he might not be heard that made him shout. The more people tried to quiet him, the louder he shouted. Eventually, he succeeded to be heard over the tumult of the crowd that surrounded Jesus and it made Jesus stop in His path. Mark reports that the blind man threw his cloak aside when he went to Jesus. That in itself was an act of faith. A blind person would never do such a thing. In a world where he could only identify things by touch, he would be careful to keep things where he could find them.

We would think that Jesus’ question “What do you want me to do for you?” was rather redundant. Jesus, evidently, asked him this to test his faith. The emphasis on faith is very strong in this incident. It sounds as if the Lord would not have been able to heal this man without the cooperation of the man’s own faith. As a matter of fact, Jesus states emphatically that it was the man’s faith that allowed the miracle to happen.

There is an interesting detail in the fact that the blind man had only cried for the Lord’s mercy without being specific. It was obvious that he wanted more than alms. But Jesus wanted him to be specific, to see if he really expected healing. Jesus’ reputation as a miracle worker and healer must have gone ahead of Him and the blind man had no trouble believing that Jesus could do the miracle.

Healing was instantaneous. The blind man not only received sight, but also insight which made him decide to follow Jesus and praise God.

Quoting an outside source, *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments: “Happy are those spiritually blind persons, to whom Christ has given eyes, that they may know him: feet, that they may follow him: a tongue, that they may praise him: and a heart, that they may love him! A true conversion, which no way contradicts itself, but is followed by an edifying life, makes known the majesty and power of God in a more eminent manner than the greatest external miracles.”

I. Zacchaeus 19:1-10

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.

2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.

⁶²⁸ Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34

⁶²⁹ Matt. 26:71

⁶³⁰ Matt. 3:3

⁶³¹ Matt. 8:29

3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd.

4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”

6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’”

8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

9 Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.

10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

In introducing this story, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, tells us that the name Hebrew Zacchaeus means “pure,” or “righteous.” About Zacchaeus’ occupation, he writes: “He was not simply a tax collector like others we have met in this Gospel ... but a *chief tax collector* (*architelōnēs*). This title is not found anywhere else, so its precise significance is not known, but it seems to point to the head of the local taxation department. Zacchaeus would employ others in the actual collecting of the taxes, while he passed on what the Romans required. Jericho must have been a good spot for a tax man. An important trade-route from Jerusalem to the East passed by it, and it was the centre of a good deal of local wealth, as, for example, from the famous balsam groves that abounded. It is no surprise that Zacchaeus was *rich*. In this spot with this occupation he could scarcely be anything else. But he must have been unpopular and would have had little social life. This man heard of Jesus and wanted to see him. But he had a problem, for he was *small of stature*. He could not see over people’s heads, and few would make room for such an unpopular man.”

This story is particular to Luke. Luke describes Zacchaeus as being “a short man.” Literally: “of little stature.” The Greek word used is *helikia*, which can refer to size as well as to maturity or age. Obviously, in this context it stands for size. We find the same word in the verse: “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his *life*?”⁶³² We may assume that Zacchaeus had both his size and his occupation against him. People tend to respect tall or large persons more than the short ones.

Luke’s description of Zacchaeus’ running ahead and climbing a tree to see Jesus is not without a touch of humor. Zacchaeus probably expected to remain unnoticed, hidden among the leaves of the sycamore-fig tree. Zacchaeus’ story contains the moral that one cannot hide from God, either physically or morally. And in a way Zacchaeus’ occupation and lifestyle had been an effort to hide morally.

Jesus stops at Zacchaeus’ hiding place and says to him that He came to Jericho for the specific purpose of staying at Zacchaeus’ home. We see here the same picture that John depicts in Revelation, where Jesus tells the church of Laodicea: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”⁶³³ So Jesus invites Himself in each of our lives and homes.

Zacchaeus had climbed the tree in secret; he had to come down in full public view. Hiding before God can be more embarrassing than openly coming to Him. On His way to Jerusalem to accomplish the reason for His coming into the world, Jesus had to pass through Jericho, first of all, to heal one (or two) blind. And He also came specifically to stay at Zacchaeus’ home and heal this chief publican.

Jesus’ intent did not meet with public approval. In modern terms we would say that “He went down in the poles.” The following sentence is one of the most powerful in all of Luke’s Gospel: “But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord...”

⁶³² Matt. 6:27

⁶³³ Rev. 3:20

Luke gives no details about Zacchaeus' conversion, but it is obvious that the Holy Spirit had brought about a major change in this man's heart. When conversion hits our wallet, it is real!

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about Zacchaeus' willingness to make restitution: "Where voluntary restitution was made the Law required no more than the original amount plus one fifth (Lev. 6:5; Num 5:7), so that Zacchaeus was cheerfully agreeing to do more than was necessary. He was doing what was laid down for theft with killing or selling an animal (Exod. 22:1; 2 Sam. 12:6; there is mention of sevenfold restitution in prov. 6:31, but it is not clear that this was ever required."

Jesus calls Zacchaeus "a son of Abraham," referring not to his Jewish descent, but to his act of faith. He had become one of "those who are of the faith of Abraham,"⁶³⁴ to use one of Paul's expressions.

Jesus says: "Today salvation has come to this house," referring to Zacchaeus and his whole family. Our sins always affect others as well as ourselves. Zacchaeus' whole family had been affected by his sinful practices. His wife and children had been shunned as much as he had been himself. As our sins affect other, so does our salvation.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on Jesus' statement that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house: "Memorable saying! Salvation has already come, but it is not a day nor an hour old. The word 'to this house' was probably designed to meet the taunt, 'He is gone to lodge at a sinner's house.' The house, says Jesus, is no longer a sinner's house polluted and polluting: 'This is now a saved house, all meet for the reception of Him who came to save.' What a precious idea is salvation to a house, expressing the new air that would henceforth breathe in it, and the new impulses from its head which would reach its members."

Jesus had not only come to Jericho to save Zacchaeus, He came to the world to save the world. The salvation of individuals is part of Jesus' mission to claim all of creation back for God.

J. The parable of the pounds 19:11-27

11 While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.

12 He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.

13 So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'

14 "But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

15 "He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

16 "The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.'

17 "'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

18 "The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.'

19 "His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'

20 "Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth.

21 I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.'

22 "His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow?'

⁶³⁴ Rom. 4:16

23 *Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'*

24 *"Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.'*

25 *"'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!'*

26 *"He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.*

27 *But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them — bring them here and kill them in front of me."*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about the occasion for the telling of this parable: "For some time Luke has been describing a journey to Jerusalem (... 9:11). Jericho is about 17 miles from that city, so the journey is nearly over. This led some to think that the climax was at hand and that *the kingdom of God* would *appear immediately*. The climax was indeed at hand, but it would be of a very different kind from the one these people imagined. The parable was to put them right."

There is another parable in Matthew's Gospel that has a good deal of resemblance to this one.⁶³⁵ But there are substantial differences between the two stories that indicate that, although Jesus used the same theme, this parable is not merely Luke's version of Matthew's story. Matthew stresses the ability of the servants to handle money and he uses large sums, which differ from person to person. Luke speaks of relatively small amounts and every one of the servants received the same amount.

The Pulpit Commentary states about the circumstances under which Jesus told this parable: "There was a singular fitness in the Master's choice of a framework for his parable, which at first sight would seem strange and unreal. Two nobles, Herod and Archelaus, in that age had literally gone from Jericho, where the Speaker of the parable-story then was, to a far country across the sea — to Rome, to receive a kingdom from Caesar And one of these two nobles, Archelaus, had rebuilt the stately royal palace of Jericho, under the very shadow of which the Speaker and the crowds were perhaps standing."

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary adds: "The parable may have been modeled on the well-known episode of Herod's son, Archelaus, who went to Rome to obtain title to the kingdom which his father, Herod the Great, had left to him. His brother, Antipas, supported by many of the leaders among the Jews, protested the claim, and rejected his rulership. Since the event took place about the time of Christ's birth, it was a well-known story thirty years later."

A footnote in the NIV states: "A mina was about three months' wages." According to *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, "the mina contained 100 shekels," and "sixty minas formed a talent," which "seems to have been a full weight for an able man to carry."

It is not clear for whose benefit this parable was told. Obviously, Jesus identified Himself with the man who was crowned king of his country. During His trial before Pilate, Jesus affirmed that He was "the king of the Jews."⁶³⁶ Although, on Palm Sunday, Jesus would be treated as the coming king, He saw beyond this to His ultimate rejection by the leaders of the people and, ultimately, by the people themselves.

But during this short period of time, Jesus did not delegate any authority to His disciples, or to anybody else in any way that would correspond to the distribution of the minas in this parable. We could say that the period this story refers to is the present dispensation in which Jesus is in heaven where He received the Father's crown, but has not returned to earth yet. In that case, the investigation of the servants who had been given responsibility to "put the money to work" has not yet taken place. That makes this parable very futuristic.

The most difficult part of the parable is its end. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: "The story finishes on a note of frightening severity. Those who rejected the nobleman and sent their embassy after him (14) are not forgotten. Safely installed in his kingdom and with accounts with his trading servants finalized, the

⁶³⁵ Matt. 25:14-30

⁶³⁶ Matt. 27:11

nobleman commands the destruction of those he calls plainly *these enemies of mine*. They have set themselves in opposition to him; they must take the consequences. T. W. Manson has possibly the best comment on this: ‘We may be horrified by the fierceness of the conclusion, but beneath the grim imagery is an equally grim fact, the fact that the coming of Jesus to the world puts every man to the test, compels every man to a decision. And that decision is no light matter. It is a matter of life and death.’”

K. The triumphal entry 19:28-44

1. The approach in triumph 19:28-40

28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

29 As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them,

30 “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.

31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them.

33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

34 They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it.

36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

40 “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

It is difficult to imagine a greater contrast between two incidents than the parable of the pounds and the report about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. The man, who gave the minas to his servants, returned as a king and exercised his full authority, even to the point of executing his opponents. The king who enters here is the epitome of humility and poverty, even to the point of having to borrow the young donkey on which He rode.

Two prophecies were being fulfilled in Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. The way Jesus chose to enter was in fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy: “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”⁶³⁷ The reaction of the disciples and the public was according to the prophecy of Psalm One hundred eighteen.

That Psalm is a celebration of God’s *chesed*, His eternal covenant love. It is full of shouts of victory. There is a reference to the crucifixion and resurrection in “I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done. The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death” (vv.17,18). Another image speaks of Jesus’ rejection by the leaders of the nation and His vindication by God: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (vv.22-24). It is here we find the word “Hosanna,” Hebrew: *Howshiyah* (save us!). That shout accompanied the leading of the sacrifice to the altar that foreshadowed the cross. The crowd literally quoted this Psalm by shouting: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

⁶³⁷ Zech. 9:9

Jesus knew, on the basis of these Old Testament prophecies, that the Father intended Him to enter Jerusalem riding on the colt of a donkey. This was not the way Roman authorities would make their entry into a city. They would mount their warhorses and lead a number of captured slaves in their procession. This Jesus would do in the invisible world, as the Apostle Paul describes it, quoting Psalm 68: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”⁶³⁸

Here is the Creator of heaven and earth, approaching the time and place at which He would accomplish what He had come to do on earth. The creator of all horses, donkeys and other animals, had to borrow a colt in order to fulfill His own prophecy. He prophesied to His disciples that they would find the animal He needed, what the owner would say and how they should respond.

The animal on which Jesus would make His entry had never been ridden before and would have to be broken in. We do not read that this was the case. Animals have less difficulty recognizing their Creator than humans do. In Matthew’s account of the story, we read that the disciples were told that they would find the mother donkey with her colt and that they were to untie both and bring both to Jesus. Jesus would sit on the colt, but in the procession the mother donkey would lead and the colt would follow it.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “At this moment in his eventful history, aware that death awaited him in the course of the next few days, he chose to gratify them; so he claimed his kingdom, but a kingdom utterly unlike what *they* longed for. He came to his royal, sacred city in the strange guise, foreshadowed by Zechariah, as a Prince of Peace, not with chariot and horse, but meekly riding on an ass’s colt, claiming, too, a dominion from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth (... Zechariah 9:10). *Whereon yet never man sat*. For this reason specially adapted for a sacred use (see ... Numbers 19:2; ... Deuteronomy 21:3; ... 1 Samuel 6:7).”

There is in the way Jesus entered Jerusalem also a fulfillment of Jacob’s prophecy in his blessing to Judah: “He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.”⁶³⁹

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about Jesus’ entry: “There is an audacity about this whole procedure. The authorities were hostile and had already given an instruction that anyone who knew where Jesus was should inform them so that he could be arrested (John 11:57). But, far from hiding in fear, Jesus came to Jerusalem publicly and triumphantly. For the present his popularity among the people prevented action being taken against him (48). But we should overlook neither the bitter hostility of the high-priestly party nor the courage manifested by Jesus and his friends.”

From this point on, the disciples take the initiative. They found no problem in getting further public assistance.

As *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “Our Lord had been traveling with a crowd of pilgrims (Luke 18:36), who had witnessed the miracle of the healing of Bartimaeus. They were sure that Jesus would claim his Messianic throne in Jerusalem at the Passover season, and so they made a public demonstration of acclaim.”

I don’t know if we can call all that happened here a demonstration of divine irony. Jesus entered Jerusalem as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”⁶⁴⁰ He knew this, but neither the public, nor His disciples did understand this, although the latter had been told this several times. In a way the public demonstration of enthusiasm was also the Father’s expression of appreciation of the Son’s willingness to give His life for the sins of the world.

And, again ironically, it was the same Hosanna-singing crowd that would shout a few days later “Crucify him!”⁶⁴¹

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “All four Evangelists tell us that the crowd cried *Blessed* and *he who comes in the name of the Lord* (cf. Ps. 118:26), but only Luke and John that they called Jesus *the King*

⁶³⁸ Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:8

⁶³⁹ Gen. 49:11

⁶⁴⁰ John 1:29

⁶⁴¹ Matt. 27:23; Mark 15:13; Luke 23:31; John 19:6

(John adds ‘of Israel’). Mark refers to the kingdom but not the King. But, expressed or not, this is implied. The crowd wanted to see the Messiah claim his kingdom and their delighted delirium arose from the fact that they saw him as doing this. Luke alone tells us that the acclamation included *Peace in heaven* (cf. 2:14). ‘God is reconciled to the human race’ ... and thus his glory is demonstrated. There may also be a reference to the situation that resulted from Satan’s defeat (10:18). Luke omits the foreign word ‘Hosanna’ (found in the other Gospels) and substitutes *glory*.” John adds the detail that the crowd took palm branches as they went out to meet Jesus.

Some of the Pharisees feared that this outburst of public enthusiasm would be misinterpreted by the Roman government and would invite measures or repression. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that the words “Rebuke thy disciples,” “were accompanied with an irritated and anxious look towards the frowning citadel of Antonia, where the Roman garrison of Jerusalem lay. It was there in full view of Jesus and the crowds. The anxious look seemed to say that the Romans were on the watch for any signs of disaffection on the part of the hated and suspected Jews.”

Some Bible scholars believe that Jesus’ reply “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out” is a reference to Habakkuk’s prophecy: “The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.”⁶⁴² This may be the case, although in the context of Habakkuk’s text, the words are used negatively and in an accusative sense.

We can hardly assume that Jesus meant literally that the stones would “cry out.” The Greek word used is *kráxousin*, which literally means “cry out immediately.” There is something in this statement the Apostle Paul comments upon in his Roman Epistle, indicating the relationship between creation and redemption of the human soul. We read: “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”⁶⁴³ If creation reacted to the fall of mankind into sin, so will creation react to the salvation of mankind.

2. The lament over Jerusalem 19:41-44

41 *As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it*

42 *and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes.*

43 *The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side.*

44 *They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”*

Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers who reports this incident. The first thing that strikes us in Luke’s description of Jesus’ reaction upon approaching the city is the Savior’s emotional character. The Greek verb used is *klaio*, which literally means “to sob,” or “to wail aloud.” Jesus did more than just choke up for a moment. It is the same verb Matthew uses in his quotation of Jeremiah’s prophecy about the massacre of the infants of Bethlehem: “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel *weeping* for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”⁶⁴⁴ In His prophetic mind, Jesus saw what would happen when the Romans would come some forty years later and destroy the city.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “All the insults and the sufferings of the Passion were powerless to elicit from the Man of sorrows that expression of intense grief which the thought of the ruin of the loved city called forth.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on Jesus’ words about Jerusalem’s failure to recognize the importance of the moment: “The Jerusalemites did not know *the things that make for peace*. There is irony here for the

⁶⁴² Hab. 2:11

⁶⁴³ Rom. 8:20-22

⁶⁴⁴ Matt. 2:18

name ‘Jerusalem’ has ‘peace’ as part of its meaning (cf. Heb. 7:2). But those in the city of peace did not know what made for peace! Especially important in the Hebrew understanding of peace (which carries over into the New Testament) is its emphasis on peace with God, right relationship between the creature and the Creator, as a necessary ingredient in true peace. It was this that the people of Jerusalem had failed to realize. And their failure to get to grips with the message of God was now final. These things, Jesus says, *are hid from your eyes.*”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes about Jesus’ prophecy: “He foresaw the siege and final capture of Jerusalem by the Romans under Vespasian and Titus in A.D. 70.” Commenting on Jesus’ detailed description of the siege “your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side, *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “This was literally fulfilled when this city was besieged by Titus. Josephus gives a very particular account of the building of this wall, which he says was effected in three days, though it was not less than thirty-nine furlongs in circumference; and that, when this wall and trench were completed, the Jews were so enclosed on every side that no person could escape out of the city, and no provision could be brought in, so that they were reduced to the most terrible distress by the famine which ensued.”

The Romans would do to the inhabitants of Jerusalem what the Babylonians did some centuries earlier. They would take children and babies, killing them in view of their parents by dashing their heads against the wall. It is hard to image such cruelty. Yet, during the Nazi period in Europe this was done to some Jewish infants. The outcry by the psalmist stands out throughout the centuries: “O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us — he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.”⁶⁴⁵ No wonder Jesus became deeply emotional at the sight of the city in which this would happen!

We could deduct from Jesus’ words that, not only the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was not an unavoidable necessity, but also that His rejection and, as part of that, crucifixion, were not inevitable. How do we reconcile that with His admonition to the disciples who wanted to defend Him against those who came to arrest Him in the garden of Gethsemane: “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”⁶⁴⁶ We must let that question rest until the moment that God reveals to us in glory the depth of His divine plan of salvation. We think of what C. S. Lewis writes in *The Chronicles of Narnia*: “We are never told what would have happened if...”

This was not the only time Jesus was overcome by emotions, seeing the lostness of man. We read earlier: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”⁶⁴⁷ The Holy Spirit will communicate Jesus’ compassion to us if we allow Him to do so.

10. Jesus in Jerusalem 19:45-21:38

A. The cleansing of the temple 19:45-46

45 *Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling.*

46 *“It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states about the cleansing of the temple: “All four Gospels have a story of temple cleansing, though John places his at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, whereas the other three have it at the end. There is reason for thinking that there were two cleansings. Luke’ account is the shortest of them all. He follows the Marcan line, the only difference (as opposed to omissions) being that where Mark has Jesus’ words, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer ...’ Luke has *My house shall be a house of*

⁶⁴⁵ Ps. 137:8,9

⁶⁴⁶ Matt. 26:53,54

⁶⁴⁷ Matt 9:36; Mark 6:34

prayer. Curiously Luke omits the words ‘for all the nations,’ though they fit well with his universalism. Perhaps he thought that the Gentiles would worship elsewhere (cf. John 4:21).”

Jesus’ entry into the temple has great historic significance. The last time the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord was at the dedication of Solomon’s temple.⁶⁴⁸ No such glorious dedication took place at the inauguration of the temple rebuilt by Zerubbabel or of this one built by King Herod. Before the destruction of Solomon’s temple, Ezekiel had seen the glory of the Lord leaving the temple.⁶⁴⁹

When Jesus entered this temple, the glory of the Lord again filled the house of the Lord, although this was not physically observable as it had been at other occasions. No one realized what happened, which was proof of the fact that they “did not recognize the time of God’s coming to [them].”

In a way Jesus’ entry into the temple was partly a fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy.⁶⁵⁰ Mark tells us that the actual cleansing of the temple did not take place the day Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, but the next morning. We read: “Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.”⁶⁵¹

The Pulpit Commentary explains: “In the outer court of the temple stalls had been erected in which money-changers were located ... in order that pilgrims from foreign lands might be able to exchange their foreign coins for the purchase of sacrificial victims. These also seem to have been sold in the precincts. All this made the courts of the Lord’s house a scene of noise and tumult, and, from the Master’s stern words, a scene often of cheating and overreaching.”

Only a certain kind of coin was accepted as valid in the temple and sacrificial animal had to be approved by the priests before they could be offered. The priests and Levites probably had financial interests in the trade that was going on. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: “The business had become a source of graft and had introduced an atmosphere of commercialism into the temple worship.”

While chasing the merchants out of the temple, Jesus quoted Isaiah and Jeremiah. Their individual text read: “Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations,”⁶⁵² and “Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you?”⁶⁵³

B. Teaching in the temple 19:47-48

47 Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him.

48 Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “This and the following verses give, after the manner of St. Luke, both in his Gospel and in the Acts, a general picture of the Lord’s life in these last days of his public ministry in Jerusalem; anal of the effect of his last teaching (1) upon the priests and scribes, etc., and (2) upon the mass of the people. The Greek word rendered ‘very attentive to hear (him)’ is an expressive one, and describes the intense attention with which the people generally listened to the last solemn public utterances of the Master. It means literally, ‘they hung upon his lips.’” That Greek word is *ekkremamai* and it is only found in this verse in the New Testament.

We are not given any information about what Jesus taught in these last days before His crucifixion. Some of what He said may be found in Matthew’s Gospel in chapters 23 and 24.

John elaborates a little more about the efforts of the priests and teachers of the law to arrest Jesus. He reports that some guards were sent, but they returned empty handed. We read: “Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him. Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who

⁶⁴⁸ 1 Kings 8:10,11

⁶⁴⁹ See Ezek. 9-11

⁶⁵⁰ Mal. 3:1b

⁶⁵¹ Mark 11:11

⁶⁵² Isa. 56:7

⁶⁵³ Jer. 7:11

asked them, ‘Why didn’t you bring him in?’ ‘No one ever spoke the way this man does,’ the guards declared.”⁶⁵⁴

C. Jesus’ authority 20:1-8

1 *One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him.*

2 *“Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave you this authority?”*

3 *He replied, “I will also ask you a question. Tell me,*

4 *John’s baptism — was it from heaven, or from men?”*

5 *They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Why didn’t you believe him?’*

6 *But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.”*

7 *So they answered, “We don’t know where it was from.”*

8 *Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”*

The inquiry by the chief priest, teachers of the law and leaders of the people pertained not only to Jesus’ teaching but also to the authority He had demonstrated in the cleansing of the temple.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the delegation that approached Jesus: “This appears to have been a formal deputation from the supreme council of the Sanhedrin. The three classes here specified represented probably the three great sections of the Sanhedrin — (1) priests, (2) scribes and rabbis, (3) Levites. These came upon him evidently with hostile intent, and surrounded him as he was walking in the temple. The jealous anger of the rulers of the Jews had been lately specially excited by the triumphant entry on Palm Sunday, and by the stir and commotion which the presence of Jesus had occasioned in the holy city. And in the last two or three days Jesus had evidently claimed especial power in the temple. He had publicly driven out the money-changers and vendors of sacrificial victims who plied their calling in the sacred courts. He had, in addition, forbidden the carrying of vessels across the temple (... Mark 11:16), and had allowed the children in the temple, probably those attached to its choir, to shout ‘Hosanna!’ to him as the Messiah. From the point of view of the Sanhedrin, such a question might well have been looked for. His interlocutors made quite sure that Jesus, in reply, would claim having received a Divine commission. Had he made openly such a formal claim in reply to their question, then he would have been cited before the supreme court to give an account of himself and his commission. Then, as they thought, would have been their opportunity to convict him out of his own mouth of blasphemy.”

In His counter-question to the delegation, Jesus clearly linked His ministry to John the Baptist’s. John had announced Him as the Messiah and the Pharisees and teachers of the law had never taken any official stand to oppose John’s message.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “Jesus’ question put his opponents on the horns of a dilemma. They do not seem to have been concerned with the facts; they concentrate on the effects, not the truth of the possible answers. They had never accepted John’s baptism and thus to say that that baptism was of heavenly origin would leave them wide open, for in that case they should have believed him and followed him enthusiastically. Had they done this they would have had the answer to their question, for they would have recognized that Jesus derived his authority from the same heavenly source as did John. There can be no doubt that they would have liked to say, *From men*. That was what they believed, but John’s popularity with the people made it an answer impossible to give. They feared being stoned.

So they gave no answer and accordingly Jesus gave none to them. He did not say that he had no authority. Throughout the whole of the four Gospels it is clear that he is very conscious of possessing the highest authority. But he will not speak about it to men who will not answer a plain question to which they knew the answer.”

⁶⁵⁴ John 7:44-46

The point was that the priests, the teachers of the law and the elders actually didn't care whether John's baptism was from heaven or not. They were only interested in public opinion, not in God's opinion. In John's Gospel Jesus had reproached them earlier, saying: "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?"⁶⁵⁵ *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes correctly: "Jesus had forced the Pharisees either to acknowledge that they had refused to heed a messenger of God, or to expose themselves to popular disfavor."

D. The parable of the wicked husbandmen 20:9-18

9 *He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time.*

10 *At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed.*

11 *He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed.*

12 *He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.*

13 *"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'*

14 *"But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'*

15 *So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?*

16 *He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!"*

17 *Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone"?*

18 *Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."*

In introducing this parable, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: "We should see this story as in part an allegorical setting out of Jesus' relationship to the Jewish leaders. He saw himself as making God's last appeal to them. Systematically the religious leaders of the Jews have rejected God's messengers (cf. Neh. 9:26; Jer. 7:25f.; 25:4-7; Matt. 23:35; Acts 7:12; Heb. 11:36-38). Now the climax is at hand. Not a prophet, but the Son of God is among them. They face the most critical decision of their lives."

The Pulpit Commentary states: "Under a very thin parabolic veil, Jesus foretells the awful tragedy of the next few days. He adopts a well-known imagery, and seems to say, 'Listen to Isaiah's well-known story of the vineyard, the vineyard of the Lord of hosts, which is the house of Israel. I will expand it a little,

that I may show you how it stands with you as regards this matter of 'authority,' that we may see whether you have as much respect for the ascertained will of God as ye pretend, so that ye should be sure to submit to me if only ye were satisfied that I was an accredited Messenger of God."

In telling this parable, Jesus demonstrated that He was quite aware of the fact that the leaders of the people were planning to capture and kill Him. He even foretold that they would be successful in doing so.

As the basis for this parable Jesus used a section from Isaiah's prophecy which reads: "I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. 'Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be

⁶⁵⁵ John 5:44

destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.’ The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.”⁶⁵⁶

To this Jesus added some quotation from Psalm One hundred eighteen: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”⁶⁵⁷ This psalm had been quoted by the public as they shouted their Hosannas at Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

At this point Jesus had come to the most confrontational moment of His ministry. It was not merely a matter of the leaders of the nation not recognizing Jesus’ divine mission and authority, they resisted it and rebelled against it. Jesus makes clear that their attitude represented the whole of Israel’s history as a nation. They had throughout the ages refused to listen to the prophets God had sent. Matthew records that Jesus had exclaimed: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”⁶⁵⁸ And Luke reported earlier Jesus’ words: “Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.”⁶⁵⁹

This parable gives Israel’s history in a nutshell. Israel had been chosen by God to be the nation through which He could reveal Himself to the world. They had only wanted God’s revelation for themselves and they refused to be the witness to the world God wanted them to be. Israel had never accepted the fact that they were chosen to be a kingdom of priests; a bridge between God and the world.

The point of the parable is that the vineyard belongs to God and the tenants behaved as if it was theirs. Israel treated God’s revelation of Himself and His glory as if it was theirs. They thought they could do with this glory what they wanted and that they were not accountable to God for what they did with it.

Many individuals live as if their life is their own, as if they can do with their body what they want and as if God will never take them to task for how they lived. The tenants owed rent to the owner of the vineyard. They acted as if God owed them instead of them owing God.

In describing the tenants plan to kill the owner’s son, who would be heir to the vineyard, Jesus revealed that He knew that the leaders of the nation planned to kill Him and that they thought that God would not do anything about it. They believed Jesus’ claim to be “the Son” to be untrue; they treated Him as an importer.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states: “The Pharisees rejected Jesus’ claims, thinking that they were the true heirs of God. Christ’s prophecy of the outcome of his last week in Jerusalem was a clear contrast to the expectations of the multitude.”

There seems to be a slight difference between Matthew and Luke in reporting the reaction of the public to this parable. In Matthew we read: “‘He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,’ they replied, ‘and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.’”⁶⁶⁰ According to Luke it is Jesus who says: “What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” And the people react by saying “May this never be!” *The Greek Interlinear* renders this as “God forbid.” Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on this: “They interject *God forbid!* (the only occurrence of this strong expression anywhere in the New Testament outside the Pauline writings).”

Jesus replies to this by quoting from the psalms and from Isaiah. A complete quote from Isaiah would read: “The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one

⁶⁵⁶ Isa. 5:1-7

⁶⁵⁷ Ps. 118:22-24

⁶⁵⁸ Matt. 23:37-39

⁶⁵⁹ Luke 11:50,51

⁶⁶⁰ Matt. 21:41

you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured.”⁶⁶¹ As a nation as a whole, Israel would not reap the benefits of Jesus’ death and resurrection. They would reject the stone which God had chosen to be the cornerstone, and that rejecting would cause them to be crushed by the stone they rejected.

E. Attempts to trap Jesus 20:19-44

1. Tribute to Caesar 20:19-26

19 *The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.*

20 *Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor.*

21 *So the spies questioned him: “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.*

22 *Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”*

23 *He saw through their duplicity and said to them,*

24 *“Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?”*

25 *“Caesar’s,” they replied. He said to them, “Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”*

26 *They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.*

The parable of the tenants hit home in a powerful way. There must have been some recognition from the side of the teachers of the law and the priests that Jesus was right and a certain sense of guilt must have made them uncomfortable enough to act immediately. Public opinion, however, was a major consideration to the ruling classes and Jesus’ popularity prevented them from arresting Him on the spot.

The NIV reads: “Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies . . .” The Greek word used is *paratereo*, which refers to an ambush. We find the word used first by Mark in the verse: “Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they *watched* him *closely* to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.”⁶⁶²

The leaders of the people engaged some persons to impersonate people who came to Jesus to ask “honest questions.” The Greek text calls them *egkathétous*, which *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* defines as: “One who crouches in some secret place to spy, listen, catch, or hurt.” The commentary states: “Josephus uses the word to signify a person bribed for a particular purpose. . . . No doubt the persons mentioned in the text were men of the basest principles, and were hired by the malicious Pharisees to do what they attempted in vain to perform.”

The irony of the situation is that the leaders of the nation tried to catch Jesus by His use of the wrong word. They tried to trap the Word, the incarnate Word, the Creator of all human speech!

Introducing their question with some flattering remarks, they put before Jesus the matter of paying taxes. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “The question concerned *tribute* (*phoros*; Matthew and Mark have *kēnsos*, ‘poll tax’) a personal tax and different from the customs duties which were levied on goods in transit. Nobody ever likes paying this sort of tax and to pay it to the hated Romans must have been particularly distasteful. The questioners asked whether this is lawful, i.e. in accord with the law of God. It was obviously in accordance with the law of Caesar, but these men were looking for a pronouncement from a religious teacher. . . . It must have been confidently expected that Jesus would be in trouble whichever way he answered.”

⁶⁶¹ Isa. 8:13-15

⁶⁶² Mark 3:2

They thought that in asking this kind of question, they would have put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. Whichever way He answered, He would be in trouble. If He spoke against payment of the tax, they would report Him to the Roman authorities. They would try to do this anyhow when Jesus stood before Pilate. They told the governor: “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king.”⁶⁶³

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “Matthew and Mark both tell us that in this plot the Herodians were united with the Pharisees (and Sanhedrin). The great Nazareth Reformer was equally hateful to both these hostile parties; hence their union in this matter. It was a well and skillfully laid question. This ‘tribute’ was a capitation tax — a denarius a head assessed on the whole population, the publicans who farmed it being answerable for it to the Roman treasury. As a direct personal tax it was most unpopular, and was looked on by scrupulous legalists and the more zealous Jews as involving a greater humiliation than the ordinary import or export customs dues. It occasioned at times popular tumults, as in the case of Judas of Galilee (... Acts 5:37). If Jesus answered the question in the affirmative ‘Yes, it is lawful for the Jews to give this tribute to Caesar,’ then the Pharisees would use this decision of his as a means of undermining his credit with the zealous populace. ‘See, after all,’ they would say, ‘this pretended Messiah of yours is but a poor-hearted traitor. *Think of King-Messiah paying tribute to a Gentile.*’ If, on the other hand, the Master had said such payment of tribute was unlawful, then the Herodians, who were watching him, hoping for some such expression of opinion, would at once have denounced him to their Roman friends as One who taught the people — only too ready to listen to such teaching — lessons of sedition. In the latter case Pilate and the officials of Rome would have taken good care that the Galilaean Master had troubled the Sanhedrin no more.”

The statement: “He saw through their duplicity,” obviously does not refer to divine omniscience, but to Jesus’ understanding as a human being of the deception of the human heart. He knew that the question was not an honest desire to receive His opinion, but a trap.

Humanly speaking, the way Jesus handled the situation was brilliant. He asked for a sample of the coin used in the payment of these taxes. They brought Him a denarius. *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states: “The basic unit of Roman coinage was the silver denarius, probably equal to a laborer’s daily wage, as in the parable of the vineyard workers.”

Bible scholars have argued the use of Roman money. Evidently, although the Romans were hated, the Jews had no qualms using Roman money. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “It seems probable, from the language of ... Mark 12:15, 16, that his interrogators had to borrow the Roman coin in question from some of the neighboring money-changers. These Jews would scarcely carry any but Jewish coins in their girdles. That the Roman denarius, however, was evidently a coin in common circulation in those days, we gather from the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.” Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “He called for a coin, i.e. a denarius. This was a Roman silver coin which had the effigy of the Emperor Tiberius stamped on it. It was required that the tax be paid in roman coinage. Various other coins, such as Greek and Tyrian as well as Jewish, circulated in Judea at the time and the pious probably avoided using coins with Caesar’s head stamped on them as much as possible. But they could produce a denarius at need and when they did they held in their hands the answer to their question if they only thought hard enough about it.”

In spite of what Bible scholars take for granted, we may assume that the Jews had less scruples using Roman coins than they would have liked to admit. They may have hated the Romans, but that doesn’t mean they hated their money. If use of Roman money was restricted because of qualms the general public felt about using it, the whole of the story would lose its powerful impact.

The Pulpit Commentary, furthermore, observes: “As regarded the immediate issues the Lord’s answer was in the affirmative: ‘Yes, it is lawful under the present circumstances to pay this tribute.’ The Roman money current in the land, bearing the image and title of the Caesar, bore perpetual witness to the fact that the rule of Rome was established and acknowledged by the Jewish people and their rulers. It was a well-known and acknowledged saying, that ‘he whose coin is current is king of the land.’”

Having lived under Nazi occupation during the Second World War, I can identify with the general feeling of the Jews in Jesus’ day about their Roman occupiers. During the war years Dutch silver coins with

⁶⁶³ Luke 23:2

the head of the Queen of the Netherlands were banned and replaced by war coinage made of zinc. The change of coins was seen as symbolic for the devaluation of more than the value of money alone. Some similar feelings must have been attached to the use of Roman coins, but that did not keep the people from using them. After all, one has to live!

Jesus' answer: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" says much more than how to use certain coins. It may have been true that Roman taxes had to be paid with Roman coins and temple contributions with another kind of coinage, but that is not the main point of Jesus' reply. Jesus established here what the Apostle Paul would later elaborate on: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."⁶⁶⁴ And the Apostle Peter would write: "Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king."⁶⁶⁵

Jesus had no intention to change the structures of worldly governments. The Messiah had not come to liberate Israel from occupation by the Roman empire. The birth of the baby in Bethlehem, "the king of the Jews" was not a threat to King Herod, who decided to massacre the all infants of that city.

The main emphasis in "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" is on giving to God the honor that is due to Him. Jesus did much more than merely escaping a trap that was set for Him; He declared the glory of the Father.

2. The seven brothers 20:27-40

27 Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question.

28 "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother.

29 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless.

30 The second

31 and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children.

32 Finally, the woman died too.

33 Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

34 Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage.

35 But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage,

36 and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.

37 But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'

38 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."

39 Some of the teachers of the law responded, "Well said, teacher!"

40 And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

When the Pharisees and teachers of the law failed to trick Jesus into giving an answer to their question that would compromise Him, the Sadducees took their turn. They came with an even sillier question than the Pharisees had produced.

The Sadducees were part of the Jewish aristocracy. Most members of the priesthood seem to have belonged to the Sadducees. *The Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* writes about the Sadducees: "Some

⁶⁶⁴ Rom. 13:1,2

⁶⁶⁵ I Peter 2:17

scholars believe the name Sadducees came from Zadok, the high priest in the days of David (2 Sam 15:24) and Solomon (1 Kings 1:34-45). Many of the wealthy lay people were also Sadducees. This may be the reason why the Sadducees gave the impression of wanting to preserve things as they were. They enjoyed privileged positions in society and managed to get along well under Roman rule. Any movement that might upset order and authority was bound to appear dangerous in their eyes. The Sadducees rejected ‘the tradition of the elders,’ that body of oral and written commentary which interpreted the law of Moses. This automatically placed them in direct conflict with another Jewish group, the Pharisees, who had made the traditions surrounding the Law almost as important as the Law itself. The Sadducees insisted that only the laws that were written in the law of Moses ... were really binding. The Sadducees thought this way because of religious practices that had taken place for several centuries.”

The point of the question the Sadducees put before Jesus was to prove how nonsensical the doctrine of the resurrection was. If it were true, they believed, there would be situations in which a woman who had been married to seven men during her lifetime, would have a hard time deciding who her husband in the afterlife was. This served as an argument against the existence of a physical life after death, which would require a bodily resurrection.

The probably hypothetical case they put before Jesus was based on law on the levirate marriage embodied in the Mosaic law. *The Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* writes about the levirate marriage: “A form of marriage prescribed by the Law of Moses in which a man was required to marry the widow of a brother who died with no male heir. The term levirate means ‘husband’s brother.’ The purpose of the law was to provide an heir for the dead brother, thereby preserving his name and estate. The law also was designed to provide for the welfare of the widows (Deut 25:5-10).”

In His answer Jesus reveals things about the condition of human beings after death, that were unknown before. According to the Genesis account, the image of God in man is reflected in male- and-female. We read: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”⁶⁶⁶ To state that the distinction in gender only exists for the purpose of procreation would limit the meaning of God’s revelation of Himself in the human race.

In the Jewish mind, however, the birth of a son meant that the name of the father would be preserved from one generation to the other. There may have been some trace of the Egyptian concept of eternity left in this that considered that the soul of a departed remained alive as long as his name existed in his offspring. That part of Jewish philosophy is contradicted in Jesus’ answer about the resurrection of the dead.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Marriage is, according to our Lord’s teaching, but a temporary expedient to preserve the human race, to which death would soon put an end. But in the world to come there will be no death and no marriage. We may assume from his words here that the difference between the sexes will have ceased to exist. *They are equal unto the angels.* Equal with the angels in being immortal; no death; no marriage. Jesus in this place asserts that angels have a body, but are exempt from any difference of sex. The angels are here introduced because our Lord was speaking with Sadducees, who (... Acts 23:8) denied the existence of these glorious beings. He wished to set the seal of his teaching on the deeply interesting question of the existence of angels.”

The resurrection Jesus mentions in this context is part of the total resurrection of all dead. In John’s Gospel Jesus gives a more detailed account about the different phases of the resurrection, pertaining to those who have believed and those who have rejected the truth. We read: “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁶ Gen. 1:27

⁶⁶⁷ John 5:21-23, 25, 28, 29

We understand that “those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead” are the people who have believed the Gospel and who had accepted Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

The Sadducees were obviously aware of the fact that Jesus had predicted His own resurrection. After Jesus’ crucifixion, they went to Pilate and said: “We remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’”⁶⁶⁸

Jesus’ answer to them is one of the most amazing in this whole episode in which both Pharisees and Sadducees tried to trick Him into saying the wrong thing. Jesus simply quoted Scripture to them, referring to God’s revelation to Moses. In Matthew’s and Mark’s Gospel, we read Jesus’ introductory words to them: “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.”⁶⁶⁹ God revealed Himself to Moses as “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”⁶⁷⁰ In referring to “the power of God” Jesus must have had His own resurrection in mind.

We are guaranteed to live eternally because God calls Himself “the God of the living.” Our eternal existence is guaranteed by the Name of God.

Some teachers of the law, who heard Jesus’ answer, complemented Him on His answer. They must have been Pharisees. Evidently, most of the priests, if not all, belonged to the party of the Sadducees, but the teachers of the law were mostly Pharisees. Luke explains the theology of both parties in Acts. We read that the Apostle Paul took advantage of the opposing theological views of both groups: “Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, ‘My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.’ When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)”⁶⁷¹

Jesus’ rebuttal of the Sadducees put an end to the effort of both parties to trick Jesus into giving wrong answers to their questions.

3. David’s son 20:41-44

41 Then Jesus said to them, “How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David?

42 David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: “The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand

43 until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” ‘

44 David calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about these verses: “Jesus rounded off the session of questions by asking one himself. The problem he posed arises from the habit in antiquity of regarding earlier generations as greater and wiser than the present one. David was the ideal king and his descendants by definition were less than he. But he himself referred to the Messiah as *Lord* (Ps. 110:1). How then could he be *David’s son*, as the scribes said? Luke does not, of course, mean that Jesus is denying his Davidic descent. He has made that descent plain over and over (1:27, 32, 69; 2:4; 18:38f.) and his story of the virgin birth, from which his readers would see that Christ pre-existed, shows that even on the scribes’ premises Jesus was greater than David. But the question arose, ‘How did the scribes understand the Psalm?’ Jesus is also clearing up a misunderstanding of Messiahship. People who used the title ‘Son of David’ (18:35-39; Matt. 21:9) clearly envisaged the Messiah as someone who would defeat all Israel’s foes and bring in a new kingdom of David. They thought of David’s son as similar to David in being, outlook and achievement. There are not wanting Jewish writings of the period which speak of the Son of David in terms of a narrow nationalism that looked for Israel’s triumph over all its foes (e.g. the *Psalms of Solomon*). Jesus means us to see that the Messiah was not David’s son in that petty sense. He was *Lord*, Lord of people’s hearts and lives. To call him *Lord* meaningfully is to see him as greater by far than merely another David.”

⁶⁶⁸ Matt. 27:63

⁶⁶⁹ Matt. 22:29; Mark 12:24

⁶⁷⁰ Ex. 3:6

⁶⁷¹ Acts 23:6-8

In the Hebrew text of the psalm quoted we read: “Yahweh said to my Adonai ...” In the Greek translation of the psalm the word *Kurios* is used for both Hebrew words.

In *Matthew's Gospel*, this dialogue is initiated by Jesus' question “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” And the people replied: “The son of David.”⁶⁷²

The Pulpit Commentary states about these verses: “This is one of the most remarkable sayings of our Lord reported by the synoptists; in it he distinctly claims for himself Divinity Unmistakably, lately, under the thinnest veil of parable, Jesus had told the people that he was Messiah. For instance, his *words* in the parable of the ‘wicked husbandmen;’ in the parable of ‘the pounds;’ in his late acts in the temple — driving out the sellers and buyers, allowing the children in the temple to welcome him with Messianic salutation, receiving as Messiah the welcome of the Passover pilgrims and others on Palm Sunday as he entered Jerusalem. In his later *parables*, too, he had with startling clearness predicted his approaching violent death. Now, Jesus was aware that the capital charge which would be brought against him would be blasphemy, that he had called himself, not only the Messiah, but Divine, the Son of God (... John 5:18; 10:33; ... Matthew 26:65). He was desirous, then, before the end came, to show from an acknowledged Messianic psalm that if he was Messiah — and unquestionably a large proportion of the people received him as such — he was also Divine. The words of the psalm (110) indisputably show this, viz. that the coming Messiah was Divine. This, he pointed out to them, was the old faith, the doctrine taught in their own inspired Scriptures. *But this was not the doctrine of the Jews in the time of our Lord. They, like the Ebionites in early Christian days, expected for their Messiah a mere ‘beloved Man.’* It is most noticeable that the Messianic claim of Jesus, although not, of course, conceded by the scribes, was never protested against by them. *That* would have been glaringly unpopular. So many of the people, we know, were persuaded of the truth of these pretensions; Jesus had evidently the greatest difficulty to stay the people's enthusiasm in his favor. What the scribes persistently repelled, and in the end condemned him for, was *his assertion of Divinity*. In this passage he shows from their own Scriptures that whoever was Messiah *must be Divine*. He spoke over and over again as Messiah; he acted with the power and in the authority of Messiah; he allowed himself on several public occasions to be saluted as such: who would venture, then, to question that he was fully conscious of his Divinity? This conclusion is drawn, not from St. John, but exclusively from the recitals of the three synoptists.”

Psalm One hundred ten is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. In quoting this psalm Jesus, not only emphasized His Messiahship, but He also referred to His ascension.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: “Messiah is at once inferior to David as his son according to the flesh, and superior to him as the Lord of a kingdom of which David is himself a subject, not the sovereign. The human and divine natures of Christ, and the spirituality of His kingdom-of which the highest earthly sovereigns are honored if they be counted worthy to be its subjects-furnish the only key to this puzzle.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* adds: “In Hebrew custom, a son was always in subjection to his father. For David to speak of his son as ‘Lord’ violated proper usage.”

The quotation also serves as a warning to the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had been looking for ways to trap Jesus in order to have grounds for His condemnation and death. According to the prophecy of the psalm, Yahweh, God Himself, would make the Messiah's enemies His footstool, subjecting them to the Messiah's authority and humbling them.

F. Warning against the scribes 20:45-47

45 *While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples,*

46 *“Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.*

47 *They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.”*

⁶⁷² Matt. 22:42

Luke gives here in a nutshell Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees and teachers of the law to which Matthew dedicated a whole chapter.⁶⁷³ The "flowing robes" are a reference to God's command to Moses for the Israelites to have blue cords in their tassels to remind them of their duty to obey God's law. We read: "Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God."⁶⁷⁴

Jesus accusation was: "They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long."⁶⁷⁵ All they did was make an outward display of piety, without any surrender of their own will to the will of God. They wanted people to know how spiritual they were, but in their acts they gave a bad name to the character of God. Jesus calls them "snakes" and "brood of vipers."⁶⁷⁶ They prayed long prayers in public but in private they took advantage of defenseless people.

G. The widow's gift 21:1-4

1 As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury.

2 He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins.

3 "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others.

4 All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: "The *treasury* was apparently the name given to a section of the court of the women where there were thirteen trumpet-shaped collection boxes, each with an inscription indicating the use to which its contents would be put. Here Jesus saw the *rich* making their gifts. Luke does not say so, but he implies that some at least were giving generously. In contrast is the offering of a certain *poor (penichra) widow*. Luke's word is unusual (here only in the New Testament) and may emphasize her penurious state. A widow had few ways of earning money in first-century Judea and normally found life very difficult. A poor widow is thus almost proverbial for the poorest of people. This one made a gift of only *two copper coins (lepta)*. The word denotes a small Jewish coin (incidentally the only Jewish coin mentioned in the New Testament). Its monetary value was small. Commentators often say that worshippers were not allowed to make gifts of less than two *lepta*, so that this was the minimum offering."

Jesus could say that the poor widow gave more than the rich, not because of the monetary value of the gift, but because she gave all she had. God does not take into account how much we give, but how much we keep for ourselves.

It has been statistically proven that when people's income increases their giving tends to go down percentage wise. It seems to be easier to give a tithe of ten dollars than of ten thousand.

The Apostle Paul writes about the generosity of the Macedonian church: "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity."⁶⁷⁷ He acknowledges that their liberality was the fruit of the grace God had given to them. It is when we realize how much it cost God to save us and we can say: "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"⁶⁷⁸ that God's grace of giving can be bestowed upon us. None of our sacrifices can ever match God's sacrifice. David asked the question: "How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me?" And he answered: "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people."⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷³ See Matt. 23:1-36.

⁶⁷⁴ Num. 15:38-40

⁶⁷⁵ Matt. 23:5

⁶⁷⁶ Matt. 23:33

⁶⁷⁷ II Cor. 8:2

⁶⁷⁸ II Cor. 9:15

⁶⁷⁹ Ps. 116:12-14

It is also good to realize that our money, or all of our possessions, are not ours to begin with. David realized this when he prayed: “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”⁶⁸⁰

This widow not only gave more generously than any of the other people who entered the temple, Jesus says she gave “all she had to live on.” It was her faith in God as her provider that made her generous. She must have had the experience the psalmist speaks about: “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”⁶⁸¹ In a way, she gave away her life, believing that God would raise her from the dead. That is the principle of all sacrifices.

H. The eschatological discourse 21:5-36

1. The sign 21:5-7

5 *Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said,*

6 *“As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.”*

7 *“Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?”*

In introducing this whole section, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: “Each of the Synoptic Gospels contains an account of this discourse, though with some differences. There are some puzzling exegetical problems, notable those posed by the fact that part of the address seems to apply to the end of all things and part to the destruction of Jerusalem. In Luke the distinction between the two seems clearer than in the others and some scholars see in this Luke’s distinctive contribution to eschatology ... The discourse expresses Jesus’ certainty of ultimate triumph, even though there were dark days ahead. And it concludes with a rousing challenge to his followers to be watchful and not let themselves be weighed down with the difficulties of this world ... The discourse is introduced by the disciples’ request for a sign of the coming destruction. As they were leaving the temple (Mark 13:1) one of them commented on the magnificence of the building. The *noble stones* were the great stones used in erecting the building (some huge stones can still be seen in the ‘wailing wall,’ but this was part of the substructure, not of the temple itself).”

At this point Jesus and His disciples had probably left Jerusalem and, while climbing the Mount of Olives, looked back at the temple. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that the setting sun lit up the white marble into a beautiful glowing mass. Evidently, the stones were decorated with gifts of gold contributed by King Herod as well as with gifts by the public.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The enormous size of the stones and blocks of marble with which the temple of Jerusalem was built excited the surprise of Titus when the city fell. Josephus mentions ... that some of the leveled blocks of marble or stone were forty cubits long and ten high. And gifts; better rendered, *sacred offerings*, such as the ‘golden vine,’ with its vast clusters, the gift of Herod — which probably suggested the discourse, ‘I am the true Vine’ (reported in John 15.) — such as crowns, shields, vessels of gold and silver, presented by princes and others who visited the holy house on Zion. The temple was rich in these votive offerings. The historian Tacitus, for instance, calls it ‘a temple of vast wealth.’”

The temple may have been a breathtaking view, but with Jesus’ leaving of the temple, it became a dead structure. The glory of the Lord no longer filled the house of the Lord. Decomposition had already set in.

There must have been sadness in Jesus’ voice as He spoke to His disciples. He had wept over Jerusalem as He entered the city, now He bemoaned the destruction of the building that had made the city the city of God. His words must have put a damper on the enthusiasm of the disciples. But Jesus’ greatest concern was not for a building of stone; as the rest of this chapter indicates, He grieved for the suffering His disciples

⁶⁸⁰ I Chron. 29:14

⁶⁸¹ Ps. 68:5

would experience in the days, years and centuries to follow. In what follows, the Lord wanted to prepare His disciples.

2. Conflict of the nations 21:8-11

8 He replied: “Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them.

9 When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”

10 Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

11 There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “The significance of these words should not be overlooked. Jesus was not predicting the end of the world within the lifetime of men then living. He regarded those who make such forecasts as false prophets.”

We assume that these words are addressed to a larger public than the disciples alone. The danger that they would be deceived by false Messiahs, having known the real One intimately, seems impossible. It is true however that, in the time between Jesus’ resurrection and His ascension, when He appeared to the disciples and others, some did not believe it was Jesus they were seeing, as Matthew reports.⁶⁸²

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Many of these pretenders appeared in the lifetime of the apostles. Josephus mentions several of these impostors ... Theudas, one of these pretenders, is referred to in ... Acts 21:38 ... Simon Magus announced that he was Messiah. His rival Dositheus, his disciple Menander, advanced similar pretences.”

The Apostles John and Paul also warn us that a person, whom they call “the Antichrist,” will come and claim to be the reincarnation of the Messiah.⁶⁸³

Jesus does not mention a specific time when His own return to earth will occur. Matthew reports that He said: “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”⁶⁸⁴ Before His return there would be worldwide disasters, both manmade and acts of God. The two world wars of the twentieth century and the tsunamis of the twenty-first seem to qualify as some of the signs Jesus predicted here.

3. Persecution 21:12-19

12 “But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.

13 This will result in your being witnesses to them.

14 But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves.

15 For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

16 You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death.

17 All men will hate you because of me.

18 But not a hair of your head will perish.

19 By standing firm you will gain life.

⁶⁸² Matt. 28:17

⁶⁸³ II Thess. 2:3, 4; I John 2:18, 20

⁶⁸⁴ Matt. 24:36

Most of the disciples who heard these words experienced what Jesus predicted here. In the early days after Pentecost the apostles suffered persecution. James was murdered⁶⁸⁵ and Peter barely escaped execution.⁶⁸⁶ And when Jesus called Paul, He said to Ananias: “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”⁶⁸⁷ The Holy Spirit would use the court cases as an opportunity for the Apostles to preach the Gospel. They probably all did this, and Luke reports particularly how Paul took advantage of the times when he was called upon to defend himself, to preach the message of salvation.

The Holy Spirit, whose Name is *Parakletos* in Greek, is the advocate, the counselor, who will take charge of the defense. Luke reports about Stephen, that he was used by the Holy Spirit in presenting the Gospel and that people who argued with him “could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.”⁶⁸⁸

Especially in the early days of the church, the Gospel message would break up intimate family relationships. Parents would betray their children and people would not hesitate to hand over their relatives to the Jewish authorities to be put to death. The Gospel message would be met with hatred, inspired by the one who hates God and who is called the “murderer of men.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “All the records of early Christianity unite in bearing witness to the universal hatred with which the new sect was regarded by pagans as well as Jews. The words of the Roman Jews reported in ... Acts 28:22 well sum this up, ‘As concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against’ (see, too ... Acts 24:5 and ... 1 Peter 2:12). The Roman writers Tacitus, Pliny, and Suetonius, bear the same testimony.”

Jesus had issued the same kind of warning earlier in His ministry. We read in Matthew: “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.”⁶⁸⁹ Actually, that warning is a quotation from Micah’s prophecy: “Do not trust a neighbor; put no confidence in a friend. Even with her who lies in your embrace be careful of your words. For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — a man’s enemies are the members of his own household.”⁶⁹⁰

It seems strange to read: “But not a hair of your head will perish,” in the context of a warning that the Gospel witness can cost one one’s life. Some commentators understand the phrase to be a proverbial expression, meaning that no eternal damage will occur to one’s soul.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The words, too, had a general fulfillment; for the Christian community of Palestine, warned by this very discourse of the Lord’s, fled in time from the doomed city, and so escaped the extermination which overtook the Jewish people in the great war which ended in the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70).”

The words “By standing firm you will gain life” must not be understood to refer to spiritual life, but to physical survival. Spiritual life cannot be acquired by human perseverance; it is God’s gift of grace to all who believe.

4. The destruction of Jerusalem 21:20-24

20 *“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near.*

21 *Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city.*

22 *For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.*

23 *How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people.*

⁶⁸⁵ Acts 12:2

⁶⁸⁶ Acts 12:1-11

⁶⁸⁷ Acts 9:16

⁶⁸⁸ Acts 6:10

⁶⁸⁹ Matt. 10:21

⁶⁹⁰ Micah 7:5,6

24 They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Luke leaves out some details we find in Matthew and Mark's version of Jesus' warning. The other two Gospels include a reference to "the abomination that causes desolation."⁶⁹¹ Luke focuses exclusively on the destruction of Jerusalem that would occur in 70 AD, not on fulfillment of events predicted by Daniel at a later stage in Israel's history.

The siege and subsequent destruction of the city of Jerusalem must have been a horrible event. Jesus was full of compassion when thinking of it. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: "Josephus tells us that 97,000 were taken prisoner throughout the war and 1,100,000 were killed in the siege." It may be hard to believe, however, that Jerusalem could have had about two million inhabitants at that time.

The Christians of that day can have been the only ones who believed Jesus' prophecy. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: "Only the flight of the Christians from the beleaguered city delivered them from the fate of the Jewish inhabitants who stayed. During a lull in the attack, the Christians left and went to Pella. Those who remained either died of starvation, or were sold as slaves."

The Pulpit Commentary states: "It is probable that these solemn words of the Master, becoming, as they did, at a comparatively early date, the property of the Church, saved the Christian congregations in Palestine from the fate which overtook the Jewish nation in the last great war. Clearly warned by Jesus that the gathering of the Roman armies in the neighborhood of Jerusalem was the unmistakable sign of the end of the Jewish polity, the Christian congregations fled to Pella beyond Jordan. The Jews never ceased to the last trusting that deliverance from on high would be vouchsafed to the holy city and temple. The Christians were warned by the words of the Founder of their faith — words spoken nigh forty years before the siege — that the time of mercy was hopelessly past."

Jesus showed particular compassion for those who were most vulnerable, pregnant women and nursing mothers. For those it would be more difficult to move fast and they could become more easily a prey of the besieging army of Roman soldiers.

Jesus also states that the siege and destruction of the city was a punishment upon the nation "in fulfillment of all that has been written." Although no details are given, the main reason for this punishment must have been the rejection of the Messiah, which was predicted by the Old Testament prophets. One of the clearest predictions had been given by Daniel to whom the angel had said: "After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary."⁶⁹²

Although Jerusalem would be rebuilt, Israel as a nation would obliterated for a period of time, called here "the times of the Gentiles." Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about this expression: "This is not an easy expression and a variety of explanation has been suggested: the time for the Gentiles to exercise God's judgments, or to be supreme over Israel, or to exercise the privileges hitherto belonging to Israel, or to have the gospel preached to them. The reference to these times as being *fulfilled* points to a divine purpose in them."

The rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1948 may be seen as an important marker in the fulfillment of this prophecy, but it does not seem to have marked the end of "the times of the Gentiles." That time will probably not end until Israel recognizes their Messiah. Zechariah prophesied about that day: "They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."⁶⁹³

5. The coming of the Son of man 21:25-28

25 "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.

⁶⁹¹ Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14

⁶⁹² Dan. 9:26

⁶⁹³ Zech. 12:10,11

26 Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Although it sounds as if Jesus addresses here particularly the twelve disciples and others who were gathered around Him, it is obvious that these words do not apply to the time when the Romans besieged and destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. There is no record of any cosmic events happening at that time and Jesus did not return to earth in the power and glory described here.

Jesus used the telescope of prophecy which takes events that are separated by centuries and makes them look as one. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* does not take this literally, but sees Jesus' words as “Figuratively pointing out the immense Roman armies by which Judea was to be overrun and destroyed.” But interpreting the text literally seems to be the best way of understanding it.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “These words are evidently a memory of language used by the Hebrew prophets to express figuratively the downfall of kingdoms. So Isaiah (... Isaiah 13:10) speaks thus of the destruction of Babylon, and Ezekiel (... Ezekiel 32:7) of the fall of Egypt (see too ... Isaiah 34:4). It is, however, probable that our Lord, while using language and figures familiar to Hebrew thought, foreshadowed a literal fulfillment of his words.”

It is true that Jesus Himself did not know the time or hour of His return to earth. He had stated earlier: “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”⁶⁹⁴ That would explain how Jesus could speak to His disciples and tell them what would happen at His return, as if they would still be alive at that time.

6. The fig tree 21:29-33

29 He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees.

30 When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near.

31 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

32 “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The little parable about the fig tree is easy to understand, but the application raises all sorts of questions that are not easy to answer. Trees begin to blossom in the spring, which means that summer is at hand. Jesus uses the picture to indicate that we can know approximately when the kingdom of God will be established. The question is whether “these things” are the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, or the cosmic upheaval described in v.25.

Another brain teaser is the remark about “this generation” which will not pass away before the things predicted would occur.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “In the interpretation of this verse, a verse which has occasioned much perplexity to students, any non-natural sense for ‘generation’ (*geneá*), such as being an equivalent for the *Christian Church* (Origen and Chrysostom) or *the human race* (Jerome) must be at once set aside. *Geneá* (generation) denotes roughly a period of thirty to forty years. Thus the words of the Lord here simply asserted that within thirty or forty years all he had been particularly detailing would be fulfilled. Now, the burden of his prophecy had been the destruction of the city and temple, and the signs they were to look for as immediately preceding this great catastrophe. This was the plain and simple answer to their question of ver. 7, which asked ‘when these things should come to pass.’ The words he had added relative to the coming of the Son of man did not belong to the formal answer, but were spoken in passing. This mighty advent the Lord alluded to as probably a very remote event — an event certainly to be postponed, to use his own words, ‘until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.’ Not so the great catastrophe involving the ruin of

⁶⁹⁴ Matt. 24:36

Jerusalem and the temple, the prophecy concerning which occupied so much of the Lord's reply. *That* lay in the immediate future; *that* would happen in the lifetime of some of those standing by. Before forty years had elapsed the city and temple, now lying before them in all its strength and beauty, would have disappeared."

About the words "the kingdom of God is near," *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* writes: "These words are complementary to Luke 17:21: 'The kingdom of God is within you.'"

As we observed before, the kingdom of God can be defined as the place where God is king. Objectively, God is the supreme ruler of all of creation. As Creator, He has the power over all that exists. When the human race became corrupted in the fall, God was no longer recognized as the King of the universe. Just as the Son would be rejected by those He came to save, so was the Father rejected as King over all.

The flowering fig tree, symbol of the people of Israel, would prophetically point to the time when God's kingdom would be realized. The fact that the Holy Spirit would come down and give birth to the church was the main pointer to the fulfillment of this prophecy. The overall rejection of the church of Jesus Christ by the Jews of the first century would ring in the times of the Gentiles. All this would happen within a few decades of, what Jesus called, "this generation."

The words with which Jesus concludes this prophecy give it an eternal value. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." Even when all of creation ceases to exist, the Word of God will stand throughout eternity.

7. Be ready 21:34-36

34 *"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.*

35 *For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth.*

36 *Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on Jesus' words: "Dissipation (*kraipalé*) is properly the hangover after a carousal, 'the vulgar word for that very vulgar experience.' *Dissipation and drunkenness* are sins which are quite out of character for the Christian, but as [one Bible scholar] remarks, 'There is no sin so great but a great saint may fall into it: there is no saint so great but he may fall into a great sin.' The *cares of this life* are much more insidious, but either kind of failing can cause people to be unprepared. Verse 35 makes it clear that Jesus is talking about the end of all things and 36 that his followers have a special responsibility. The prayer he urges involves an attitude of life, an attitude that seeks to flee worldly sins as the believer concentrates on the service of God. *To stand before the Son of man* is to possess the ultimate salvation."

To "stand before the Son of Man" refers to judgment. The Apostle Paul writes about this: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."⁶⁹⁵ What Jesus is saying here means that, standing before His judgment seat, we will receive praise and not condemnation.

I. Teaching in the temple 21:37-38

37 *Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives,*

38 *and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.*

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "This brief picture of the last days of public work is retrospective. This was how our Lord spent 'Palm Sunday' and the Monday and Tuesday of the last week. The prophetic discourse reported in this twenty-first chapter was, most probably, spoken on the afternoon of Tuesday. After Tuesday evening he never entered the temple as a public Teacher again. Wednesday and Thursday were spent in retirement. Thursday evening he returned to the city to eat the last Passover with his own."

⁶⁹⁵ II Cor. 5:10

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: “During the Passover week the city of Jerusalem was always crowded with pilgrims from all parts of the empire. Christ and his disciples may have slept on the grass among the olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane.” But Bible scholars are not sure whether Jesus and the disciples slept under the open sky or whether they lodged under someone’s roof. The Greek verb used is *aulizomai*, which means “to pass the night in the open air,” but Matthew uses the same verb in “And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night,” which probably means that Jesus stayed in someone’s home.

Luke leaves out several incidents which we find recorded in the other two synoptic Gospels. Matthew and Mark report Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree⁶⁹⁶ and Mark mentions the cleansing of the temple at this time, which Luke reported at an earlier moment.⁶⁹⁷

Jesus’ popularity was still very high at this point and His teaching in the temple drew a large crowd.

11. THE CRUCIFIXION 22:1-23:56

A. The betrayal 22:1-6

1 *Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching,*

2 *and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people.*

3 *Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve.*

4 *And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus.*

5 *They were delighted and agreed to give him money.*

6 *He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.*

Writing to non-Jewish readers, Luke calls the feast that was approaching the Feast of Unleavened Bread or Passover. The actual Passover was a single celebration on the eve of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was celebrated for one whole week.

The chronology of events of the last week of Jesus’ life has been a point of discussion and contention among Bible scholars. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: “All our Gospels agree that the crucifixion took place on a Friday in the Passover season, but whether the Passover coincided with the Lord’s Supper (as it seems to do in the Synoptics) or with the crucifixion itself (as John seems to say) is one of the most difficult questions in New Testament interpretation.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states: “We have now arrived, in the progress of the Redeemer’s earthly history, at the fifth day of His last week—the Thursday—on which the preparations now to described were made. Here arises a question of extreme difficulty, a question very early discussed in the Church, a question which has divided and to this day divides, the ablest critics: ‘Did our Lord eat the Passover with His disciples at all? and if He did, was it on the same day on which it was eaten by the rest of the Jews, or was it a day earlier?’ Had we only the testimony of the first three Evangelists, there could be no doubt both that He ate the Passover, and that He ate it on the usual statutory evening—on the fourteenth day of the month Nisan; for their testimony to this effect is concurrent and decisive (Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7; with which the whole of Matt 26:17, etc., though less explicit, accords). But, on the other hand, if we had only the testimony of the Fourth Evangelist, we should not be perfectly sure that our Lord ate the paschal supper at all; or if it should seem clear enough, though not explicitly stated that the ‘supper’ of John 13 was no other than the Passover, one would certainly have been apt to conclude, from some expressions in that Gospel, that up to the morning of the Friday—when our Lord was before the ecclesiastical and civil tribunals for judgments—the Jews had not eaten their Passover, and consequently, that Jesus and His disciples, if they ate it at all, must have eaten it a day before the proper time.”

⁶⁹⁶ Matt. 21:17-22; Mark 11:12-14

⁶⁹⁷ Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45,46

From Matthew’s text it is obvious that the meal Jesus ate with His disciples was the Passover. Although Matt. 26 begins two days before, we read: “On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?’”⁶⁹⁸ The “two days” may have been a much shorter period of time than we would understand it to be. The Jewish day began at sundown, six o’clock in the evening. From 5:58 PM to 6:01 PM would be counted as two days! In the same way would Jesus’ being in the grave for three days and three nights be no longer than perhaps twenty-four hours plus a few minutes.

In the Hebrew text stipulating the details of the Passover celebration it reads that the lamb must be killed *beeyn haa’arbaayim*. This can be translated “in the evening” as well as “between the evenings.” To the Western mind used to pinpointing time up to the solar second, this makes no sense. But in a culture where people go by the sun instead of by the clock, that is an indication close enough to be observed.

Matthew writes that the chief priests and elders tried to get rid of Jesus before the Passover feast began. We read: “Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. ‘But not during the Feast,’ they said, ‘or there may be a riot among the people.’”⁶⁹⁹

Luke states that Satan entered Judas’ heart, which made him decide to betray Jesus to the Jewish authorities. According to John’s Gospel, Satan took full control of Judas during the actual Passover celebration when Jesus handed the bread to him.⁷⁰⁰ It is clear, however, that Judas was under demonic control when he went to the authorities to offer his services to them.

Luke does not mention the amount of money given to Judas, which, according to Matthew, amounted to thirty pieces of silver.⁷⁰¹ In doing this Judas fulfilled Zechariah’s prophecy, which reads: “I told them, ‘If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.’ So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’-the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter.”⁷⁰²

B. In the upper room 22:7-38

1. Preparations 22:7-13

7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.

8 Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.”

9 “Where do you want us to prepare for it?” they asked.

10 He replied, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters,

11 and say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’

12 He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there.”

13 They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: “The fullest account of what took place in the upper room on the night before the crucifixion comes from John. Luke’s account is not as full, but it is longer than those in Matthew and Mark, and he has some information of his own.”

About the preparations of the feast, Morris writes: “Jesus seems to have made a secret arrangement with the owner of the house. By doing this he prevented Judas from betraying him prematurely. He would die, but in his own good time, not when his enemies chose. So none of the disciples knew where the meal

⁶⁹⁸ Matt. 26:17

⁶⁹⁹ Matt. 26:3-5

⁷⁰⁰ John 13:27

⁷⁰¹ Matt. 25:16

⁷⁰² Zech. 11:12,13

would be. Peter and John were to look for *a man carrying a jar of water*, which would be distinctive, for women usually carried water jars (men carried water skins). He would lead them to a house where they were to say certain words to the householder, evidently and agreed formula. The householder would show them *a large upper room furnished*. This last word is literally ‘spread’ and probably means that there would be couches ready with coverings spread over them.”

The Pulpit Commentary adds: “The name of the man who should meet them was omitted — purposely ... lest the place of meeting should be prematurely known to Judas. *Bearing a pitcher of water*. This would be an unusual sight in an Oriental city, where the water is drawn by women. It is probable that the ‘man’ whom the Master foretold John and Peter would meet, was the master of the house, who, according to the Jewish custom on the 13th of Nisan, *before the stars appeared in the heavens*, had himself to go to the public fountain to draw the water with which the unleavened bread for the Passover Feast was kneaded.

The house which possessed so large an upper chamber must have been one of considerable size, and evidently belonged to a man of some wealth and position, possibly to Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea. That it perhaps belonged to St. Mark’s family has also been suggested. It had evidently been prepared beforehand for the purpose of the feast, in obedience to a previous direction of Jesus. ‘Furnished’ (*èstromonon*) applies specially to carpets spread over the couches for the reception of guests. ‘In this large upper chamber thus prepared,’ said the Lord, ‘make the necessary arrangements for the Paschal Supper; procuring and preparing the lamb, the unleavened bread, the herbs, and other customary dishes.’ It seems probable that this ‘large upper room,’ evidently belonging to a disciple, or at least to one friendly to Jesus, was the same room which, in the happier hours *after* the Resurrection, witnessed the appearance of the Risen to the eleven, and, later, the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost.”

2. The last supper 22:14-20

14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.

15 And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”

17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you.

18 For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers who describes Jesus’ human emotions during this celebration. Jesus knew that this supper would, in effect, be “the last supper,” in the most literal sense of the word. Not only would Jesus’ human life end on earth, but it would be the last Passover celebration as an image of the heavenly reality it represented. Thus far, lambs had been taken as substitutes for the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.” Now the sacrifice of the actual Lamb would take place.

It would also be, in a sense “the first supper.” The Apostle Paul writes about this: “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast — as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.”⁷⁰³

In this Passover celebration all the elements find their fulfillment in the reality of Jesus’ crucifixion and death. The bread that was broken became the body of Christ and the wine that was poured became His blood. In saying this I am not propagating the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.

Luke’s version of this celebration differs from the other Synoptics in that he introduces the meal with the drinking of a cup of thanksgiving. That first cup of wine made the greatest tragedy earth would ever witness into a celebration of the fulfillment of God’s plan of redemption.

⁷⁰³ I Cor. 5:7,8

The drinking of the second cup made the celebration into a blood-covenant. There was in the Old Testament a covenant in which animals were killed and the two parties who pledged their allegiance to each other would walk between the dead animal that had been cut up and divided in two parts, signifying that they would suffer the ultimate consequence if they would not keep the covenant they agreed to.

God had given Abraham a dream with a vision in which Abraham saw a blazing torch passing through pieces of several animals that he had prepared.⁷⁰⁴ The ritual, evidently, was a common way of making a covenant between two parties at that time. Both parties were supposed to pass between the pieces of cut-up animals, indicating their determination to keep the terms of the agreement. In passing between to pieces, they declared “If I don’t keep my side of the covenant, may I become like the animals between which I pass.” In Abraham’s vision, only God passed between the pieces, indicating that the covenant was one-sided.

In taking upon Himself the sins of the world, Jesus, in a way, fulfilled the vision Abraham had received in that dream. He was cut up for us and gave His life in our place; though we were the ones who had not kept our side of the bargain.

The Greek text of v.15 reads literally: “With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” Evidently, this is a Hebrew idiom that expresses great intensity. The Apostle John renders this intense desire as follows: “Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God ...”⁷⁰⁵

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments here beautifully: “The last meal one is to partake of with his family or friends before his departure even for a far distant land, in all probability never to see them again, is a solemn and fond one to any thoughtful and loving person. The last meal of a martyr of Jesus with his friends in the truth, before being led forth to execution, is still more touching. But faint are these illustrations of the emotions with which Jesus now sat down to supper with the Twelve. All the sweetness and all the sadness of His social intercourse with them, from the day that He first chose them to be with Him, were now to be concentrated and heightened to their utmost intensity during the brief hour or two of this their last meal together. But this was no common meal, nor even common Passover. It was to be the point of transition between two divine economies and their respective festivals; the one to close forever, the other to run its majestic career through all time, until from a terrestrial form it should dissolve into a form celestial. No wonder, then, that He said, ‘With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.’”

In celebrating communion in our church services, we rarely enter into the emotional and spiritual depth of the moment it was first celebrated by Jesus and His disciples. Our Roman Catholic brothers and sister, who believe that the elements they partake of actually change into the very body and blood of Christ, may have an emotional advantage over us.

Actually, some of the depth of Jesus’ desire for fellowship recurs every time a person opens the door into his life to let the Savior in. In Revelation, we read that Jesus says to the church in Laodicea: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” Conversion becomes a celebration of this meal. And daily fellowship with our Lord ought to have Eucharistic elements in it. In the words of the Apostle Paul: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”⁷⁰⁶

3. Jesus’ prophecy of the betrayal 22:21-23

21 But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table.

22 The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.”

23 They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

⁷⁰⁴ Gen. 15:9-21

⁷⁰⁵ John 13:1,3

⁷⁰⁶ I Cor. 10:31

Bible scholars have debated whether Judas was actually present during the communion service or had already left. From Matthew and Mark’s account it could be concluded that Judas was no longer present when Jesus broke the bread and passed the cup. John’s account of the events ought to settle the matter. We read: “After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, ‘I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.’ His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, ‘Ask him which one he means.’ Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, ‘Lord, who is it?’ Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’ Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. ‘What you are about to do, do quickly,’ Jesus told him, but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.”⁷⁰⁷

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “Luke’s prophecy of the betrayal lacks the reference to dipping in the common dish the others have, but the hand *on the table* presumably means much the same. It is a mark of close fellowship and the betrayal stands out as all the more horrible in the light of it. Jesus goes on to make it clear that his death is in the divine purpose. It has been *determined* (the other Synoptists mention that Scripture is being fulfilled). But this does not mean that the betrayer is guiltless. The fact that God overrules the evil that bad people do as he brings his purposes to pass does not make them any the less evil. They remain responsible people. *Woe to that man* is better ‘Alas for that man.’ It is not vindictive, but an expression of grief over the undefined but unpleasant future that he has brought down upon himself. Apparently Judas had disguised his thoughts well, for the other disciples *began to question one another* as to whom Jesus meant. No-one seems to have suspected him.”

4. A dispute as to the greatest 22:24-27

24 *Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.*

25 *Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.*

26 *But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.*

27 *For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.*

Judas may have left the company of disciples at this point and Satan who had taken possession of him left with him, but that did not mean that all demonic presence had left the upper room. We read: “a dispute arose among them.” The Greek word used is *philoneikia*, which can be rendered “quarrelsomeness.” This outburst of carnality must have filled the room with spiritual darkness, which must have hurt Jesus to the depth of His soul.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, remarks: “Only Luke tells us of this dispute in the upper room. Matthew and Mark have passages that resemble this one, but not in the farewell discourse. John has the feet-washing, which presupposes something like the attitude revealed here, but he does not have this quarrel. With Jesus so close to the cross, his most intimate followers were so far from him in spirit.”

There could be no doubt as to who was the greatest in the upper room at that moment. It was the One “who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!”⁷⁰⁸

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “The strife among the disciples which suggested the Lord’s corrective sayings was evidently no mere dispute as to precedence in their places at the supper, but some question as to their respective positions in the coming kingdom of which their Master had said so much in the course of

⁷⁰⁷ John 13:21-30

⁷⁰⁸ Phil. 2:6-8

his later instructions. It is closely connected with the ‘footwashing’ related at length by St. John (... John 13:4-17). This has been well described as a parable in action, exhibited to illustrate forcibly the novel and sublime truth which he was teaching them, the world-teachers of the future, that in self sacrifice consisted the secret of true greatness. In the kingdom of heaven this would be found to be conspicuously the case.”

There is a good deal of irony in Jesus’ remark to the disciples. He compares them to Gentiles, saying, you do not behave like Jews are supposed to behave themselves. God had revealed Himself to the people of Israel. That fact ought to have made each Israelite into the humblest of all people on earth. Instead they boasted on the fact of God’s revelation, as if they had merited this.

Describing the attitude of kings who yield absolute power, Jesus says: “those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.” The Greek word used is *euergetes* which can be rendered “philanthropist.” This is the only place in Scripture where this word is found.

It is difficult to image a greater contrast than the picture Luke draws for us. Here is the Lord of glory, bending down before a bunch of proud, sinful men, who boast of their greatness, without being aware of the fact that their sin made them odious before God. They declare themselves to be greater than the Lord of the universe, who was about to take the full load of their filth upon Himself and carry it away like the Old Testament scapegoat.

5. Twelve thrones 22:28-30

28 *You are those who have stood by me in my trials.*

29 *And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me,*

30 *so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Evidently, the matter the disciples argued about was their future position in the kingdom. The topic must have been one that came up from time to time in their discussions, as is clear from the request the mother of the sons of Zebedee put to Jesus for her sons to sit at a place of honor in the kingdom.⁷⁰⁹

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: “Jesus did not deny that there would be a kingdom in which his disciples would rule. His affirmation revealed his confidence that his death would not end their hopes, but that ultimately he would see the reward of his sufferings and share it with the disciples. 30. The twelve tribes of Israel. A similar promise is quoted in Matt 19:28. The disciples would have understood this to mean a literal rule over Israel, restored to national status.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “A hard and perplexing road lay ahead of the disciples and Jesus proceeds to give them encouragement. First he speaks of them as *those who have continued with me in my trials*; they have served with him faithfully throughout all the hardships his ministry had necessarily involved. They had not shunned the difficult or the lowly place. They will in due course enjoy the Messianic banquet with him ... The royal states they will enjoy is expressed rather in their sitting *on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*, for *judging* is surely used here in the sense of ‘ruling’ (as in the book of Judges). Jesus speaks of all this in the language of covenant. The verbs assign and assigned both render forms of *diatithemai*, the usual biblical word for the making of a covenant. The glorious future of which Jesus speaks is as sure as the covenant of God.”

The mention of “the twelve tribes of Israel” gives to Jesus’ proclamation an apocalyptic character. A literal interpretation seems impossible since a restoration of Israel as one nation, consisting of twelve distinct tribes the Israel never materializes after the breaking up of Solomon’s kingdom. The Israel Jesus mentions here is “the Israel of God” the Apostle Paul mentions in his epistle to the Galatians.⁷¹⁰

6. Prophecy of Peter’s denials 22:31-34

31 *“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.*

⁷⁰⁹ Matt. 20:20-23

⁷¹⁰ Gal. 6:16

32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

33 But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”

34 Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes correctly: “This saying of Jesus is a very mysterious one; it reveals to us something of what is going on in the unseen world.” We are not told exactly how the enemy had proceeded in his plea for Peter’s soul. Jesus uses the positive image of a farmer winnowing his wheat harvest. The point of winnowing is to separate the wheat kernel from the chaff, for the purpose of keeping the wheat and disposing of the chaff. That was, obviously, not Satan’s intent with Peter. He wanted to make it appear that Peter was “all chaff.” The way Jesus put this shows that God was going to allow Satan to tempt Peter, so that all that would remain would be the wheat. For this to happen Jesus had prayed an intercessory prayer for His disciple, which would not keep him from the temptation and not even prevent him from falling, but which would assure his repentance.

It was very important for Peter to get to know himself. He believed that he had what it took to stand with Jesus to the end, even the bitter end of death. Peter didn’t know what fear could produce in his life. He needed to fall and hurt himself in order to discover that without Christ he could do nothing.

Jesus addresses Peter as “Simon, Simon.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments on this: “When a name is thus relocated in the sacred writings, it appears to be always intended as an expression of love, manifested by a warning voice. As if he had said, While thou and the others are contending for supremacy, Satan is endeavoring to destroy you all: but I have prayed for thee, as being in most danger.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes about Jesus’ mention of the crowing of the cock: “Most interesting and touching is the fact, that whereas in the first, third, and fourth Gospels only one crowing of the cock is mentioned as sounding the note of Peter’s fall, in the second Gospel—which all ancient tradition proclaims, and internal evidence suggests, to have been drawn up under the immediate eye of Peter—it is said that two crowings of the cock would sound his fall. And as it is Mark alone who records the fact that the cock did crow twice—the first time after one denial of his Lord, and the second immediately after the last—we have thus an affecting announcement, almost from his own pen, that warning after warning passed unheeded, until the second knell rung in his ears and bitterly revealed how much wiser his Lord was than he.”

A crowing cock has become a symbol of a call for repentance. Most of the Christian Reformed churches in the Netherlands carry a cock on the steeple of the church as a reminder.

7. Two swords 22:35-38

35 Then Jesus asked them, “When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?” “Nothing,” they answered.

36 He said to them, “But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.

37 It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.”

38 The disciples said, “See, Lord, here are two swords.” “That is enough,” he replied.

This part of Jesus’ conversation with His disciples is distinctive to Luke; the other two Synoptic Gospels do not record this. It sounds very strange that Jesus would advise His disciples to provide themselves with swords, as if He wanted them to defend Him as He was going to be arrested and executed. It is obvious from what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane, that this was not Jesus’ intent. We read that when, at Jesus’ arrest Peter drew his sword and cut off Malchus’ ear, Jesus said: “Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”

Bible scholars are divided as to whether “the sword” is here to be taken literally or symbolically. The introductory remark about the supernatural provision of their needs while they were on their earlier evangelistic campaigns would suggest that the sword is meant as literally as the purse, bag or sandals.

The sword obviously refers to battle. And that may be the prevailing thought in this remark by Jesus. Some interpret the sword as symbolic for the Holy Spirit in the same way as the Apostle Paul uses it in his epistle to the Ephesians: “Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”⁷¹¹

In connection with this whole conversation, Jesus referred to Isaiah’s prophecy, which reads literally: ‘because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.’⁷¹² Even more prevalent in Jesus’ mind may have been Zechariah’s prophecy: “‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones,’”⁷¹³ which Jesus also quoted according to Matthew’s account.⁷¹⁴

It is obvious that the disciples took Jesus’ word about the sword literally, since they said that there were two. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about this: “The disciples did not understand; they spoke in terms of this world’s arms and said they could muster only *two swords*. Jesus’ response, *It is enough*, means not ‘Two will be sufficient’ but rather, ‘Enough of this kind of talk!’ He dismisses a subject in which the disciples were so hopelessly astray.”

The disciples had no inkling about the spiritual battle that was ahead. Paul’s words could be quoted here: “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.”⁷¹⁵ Satan would try to vanquish the Son of God with a weapon used in earthly battle. And Jesus would physically die in that battle. But, ultimately, the victor would be the loser. Jesus could have quoted David’s words to Goliath: “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head.”⁷¹⁶

C. The agony 22:39-46

39 *Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.*

40 *On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.”*

41 *He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed,*

42 *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”*

43 *An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.*

44 *And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

45 *When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow.*

46 *“Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”*

Jesus’ prayer is recorded by all three Synoptic Gospel writers.⁷¹⁷ Luke’s account is the shortest of the three. He only mentions one of Jesus’ prayers, which say Matthew and Mark, was repeated twice. Matthew

⁷¹¹ Eph. 6:17

⁷¹² Isa. 53:12

⁷¹³ Zech 13:7

⁷¹⁴ Matt 26:31

⁷¹⁵ II Cor. 10:4

⁷¹⁶ I Sam. 17:45,46

⁷¹⁷ Matt. 26:36-43; Mark 14:32-41

and Mark indicate that the place was the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke refers to the Mount of Olives. The garden of Gethsemane can be seen as part of the Mount of Olives.

All three Evangelists mention that the topic of Jesus' prayer is the removal of "this cup." Many Bible scholars interpret "this cup" as being Jesus' death on the cross. That interpretation seems to be inconsistent with Jesus' attitude toward the goal of His coming to earth. According to John's Gospel, Jesus had earlier dismissed the thought of prayer for removal of the cup of suffering. We read that He said: "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 'Father, glorify your name!'"⁷¹⁸

Jesus' request cannot refer to His death on the cross. If that were the case it would invalidate everything He had ever said and done. If Jesus seriously asked here to be spared crucifixion and death, He would have asked for annulment of "the eternal covenant." We read in the blessing in Hebrews: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."⁷¹⁹ The Lamb was slain from the creation of the world.⁷²⁰ Everything Jesus ever did by way of miracles, based on His death and resurrection, would be worthless and invalid. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁷²¹ If Jesus took back these words He would have to apologize to the sellers and money changers in the temple.

At Gethsemane Jesus fought His last battle with the prince of darkness. Satan may have wanted to keep Jesus from going to the cross. He may have guessed that that was the place where the seed of Eve would crush the serpent's head.⁷²² In this hour of darkness he stood before Jesus with all the hosts of hell, trying to keep the Lord of glory from reaching His goal.

Jesus fought this spiritual battle with great cost to His body. Luke, the physician, observes that Jesus' prayer was so intense that "his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." The limitations of Jesus' human body were stretched to the extreme and beyond and there was a real possibility that, physically, Jesus was unable to pull through this moment. This would have meant that He would have died in the garden, instead of on the hill of Golgotha. That is why an angel came to touch Him and give Him the physical strength needed for Him to pull through. Luke is the only Gospel writer who gives this information.

If we consider that Jesus' words "yet not my will, but yours be done" do not refer to being spared from death on the cross, but to actually succumbing in Gethsemane, they acquire momentous significance. It would amount to Jesus' coming to earth for the purpose of carrying away the sins of the world as the Lamb of God, but not being allowed to do so at the last moment. The issues at stake in Jesus' prayer were so immense that our human brain cannot fully grasp them.

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is the most important prayer ever prayed on earth by any human being. It was the perfect Man, Jesus Christ who prayed these words. The Father heard this prayer and gave the Son what He asked for. The author of Hebrews comments on this particular prayer: "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."⁷²³

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes that this is the only place in Scripture where the word "agony" is used. The Greek word is *agonia*.

⁷¹⁸ John 12:27,28

⁷¹⁹ Heb. 13:20,21

⁷²⁰ Rev. 13:8

⁷²¹ Matt. 20:28

⁷²² Gen. 3:15

⁷²³ Heb. 5:7-9

Apart from the cosmic features of the struggle being fought in the garden, there was an added feature of sorrow Jesus had to face: loneliness. As a human being He was in need of compassion and sympathy. He expected His closest friends to stand with Him and give Him some measure of human support. They were fast asleep! Luke seems to excuse them by saying that sorrow exhausted them. These were fishermen who were in the habit of spending sleepless night on the water.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “The events of the past evening; the long excitement stirred up by listening to such words as their Master had been speaking to them during the sad hours of the Last Supper; the sure consciousness of coming sorrow; then the walk through the silent city: — all predisposed them to sleep. Commentators are never weary with pressing these excuses for the slumber of the eleven at that awful moment. But all these things, though they may well have predisposed them to slumber, are not sufficient to account for that strange heavy sleep which seems to have paralyzed the eleven in Gethsemane. In spite of their Master’s solemn injunction to watch and pray, he finds them, several times during that dreadful watch of his in the garden, asleep, in spite of his asking them for sympathy and prayer, in spite of his evident longing for their sympathy — each time he cast his eyes on them, he sees them, not watching, but sleeping! Many a time in their work-filled lives those fishermen he loved so well, John and Peter and Andrew, had toiled all night with their nets; but on this night of sorrow, when their pleading voices were listened for, possibly their hand-press waited for, their silent sympathy certainly longed for, they slept, seemingly forgetful of all save their own ease and comfort. Surely on this night of temptation they were influenced by some invisible power, who lulled them to sleep during those precious moments when they should have been agonizing with their Master in prayer, and so arming themselves against the supreme moment of temptation just coming upon them. But swayed by the power of evil of whom the Lord had been warning them, but in vain, they let the moments slip by, and the hour of temptation came on them unawares. We know how grievously they all fell.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, adds: “When Jesus returned to the disciples after the harrowing experience he found them *sleeping for sorrow*, ‘worn out by grief’ as NEB puts it. It must have added to his trial that at this critical moment his closest followers were so insensitive to his feeling and to what was happening about them that they slept instead of praying with and for him. They have failed this test and he tells them to pray that they *may not enter into temptation*. The repetition of the instruction (40) gives it emphasis. There will be further test and they must pray for the right attitude next time.”

D. The arrest 22:47-54a

47 *While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him,*

48 *but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”*

49 *When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?”*

50 *And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.*

51 *But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.*

52 *Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs?”*

53 *Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour — when darkness reigns.”*

54 *Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest.*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “Luke’s account of the arrest is shorter than those of the other, but he yet includes matter of his own, such as the disciples’ question (49), the healing of the ear (51), and the reference to the power of darkness (53).

The arrest followed immediately upon Jesus’ return to the disciples. Judas and his aides came up while Jesus *was still speaking*. Luke contents himself with the mention of *a crowd* and does not tell us, as Matthew and Mark do, of their connection with the Sanhedrin and of the arms they carried (which points come out later), nor of the Romans who were with them, as John does. He confines himself to the

essentials. Judas' crime is brought out again only with the reminder that he was *one of the twelve*. Luke says that Judas approached Jesus to kiss him, though he does not mention the actual kiss. Nor does he say that this was the sign Judas had given the soldiers, though this is clear from Jesus' reaction. *Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?* The kiss was a not unusual form of greeting when men met (cf. 1Thess. 5:26). It was thus a convenient way for Judas to show the soldiers which of the group was Jesus and to make sure that they did not arrest the wrong man. But the kiss of greeting expressed friendship and esteem, even love, and accordingly this method of betrayal has always seemed particular heinous."

"Heinous" is the right word to describe Judas' act of betrayal. We are reminded of the fact that Satan had taken possession of Judas at the moment he accepted the bread Jesus presented to him during the Passover celebration. John tells us: "As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him."⁷²⁴ Judas took the bread that represented the body of Christ, broken for him for the forgiveness of his sin; it made him the devil's accessory.

Jesus' remark when Judas kissed Him was another form of extending grace to this wretch of humanity. But Satan was not interested in grace. The kiss can be one of the most wonderful expressions of love and intimacy. To turn God's symbol of love into a mark of death is one of the most diabolic inventions one can imagine. Jesus' words "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" are an expression of deep shock. How low can one fall!

Luke tells us that the disciples asked Jesus' permission to strike back and that one of them drew his sword and acted. John identifies the disciple as Peter and the victim as Malchus.⁷²⁵ Peter must have intended to split the poor guy's head open and only got the ear, because Malchus moved his head. Luke, the physician, reports Jesus' miracle of healing the ear. This was Jesus' last miracle of physical healing before His death on the cross. Jesus' stripes would pay for this healing also.

Luke omits the details of Jesus' capture that we read about in John's Gospel, where the soldiers, who came to arrest Him, fell to the ground when Jesus spoke to them.⁷²⁶ He does report Jesus' remark that the darkness of the night represented the power of darkness under whose inspiration they acted. Jesus' words to those who came to arrest Him were an attempt to reason and make them see that what they were doing was strange, to say the last. Jesus had been ministering publically in the temple during the whole last week in Jerusalem. They never came to touch Him for fear of public opinion. They waited till it was dark, not just the dark of night but the spiritual darkness in which demons operate. The fact that their act was in fulfillment of biblical prophecy meant that they were also operating under the guidance of the Spirit of the prophets, which is the Holy Spirit of God. That is the ultimate paradox of what happens here. Matthew and Mark make this clear in their identical statements: "But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled."⁷²⁷ And: "But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."⁷²⁸ Even Satan, the prince of darkness cannot do anything without fulfilling Scriptural prophecy. That thought must have hurt him deeply.

E. Peter's denials 22:54b-62

54b Peter followed at a distance.

55 But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them.

56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

57 But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

58 A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

⁷²⁴ John 13:27

⁷²⁵ John 18:10

⁷²⁶ John 18:4-9

⁷²⁷ Matt. 26:55

⁷²⁸ Mark 14:49

59 About an hour later another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.”

60 Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed.

61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.”

62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.

In introducing this section, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: “Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus is recorded in all four Gospels. Some problems arise. For example, whereas the Synoptists record them all together, John interpolates an examination before Annas between the first and second. This, however, need mean no more than that the Synoptists complete the account once they have started it. No-one holds that the three denials must have followed on another immediately. There must have been intervals (cf. 58-59) and things would have happened during those intervals. Another problem is that, after the first occasion, different people are said to challenge Peter. In Mark the second denial appears to be elicited by a question from the same slave girls, in Matthew from a different slave girl, in Luke from a man and in John from a number of people. A little reflection shows that in such a situation a quest once posed is likely to have been taken up by others round the fire. Different people telling about it would stress different participants in the drama.”

Peter entered the courtyard of the palace where Jesus was first being interrogated with the help of John. We read: ‘Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in.’⁷²⁹ No explanation is given as to how John was familiar with the high priest and the place. He may have delivered fish or other merchandise to the family in the days before he began following Jesus.

One of the interesting features of the story is that John must have been known among the servants as one of Jesus’ disciples. This did not seem to have bothered anybody. It was Jesus who was on trial, not Jesus’ disciples. That would mean that Peter was in no danger of being dragged into the procedure that was going on inside the building. If he had given honest answers to the questions being put before him, most likely, nothing would have happened to him. Peter’s problem was not danger but fear.

So, here is the man who had said one hour earlier: “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”⁷³⁰ He sits by the fire shivering more with fear than because of the cold.

According to Luke, three people came to Peter and asked him more or less the same question. Luke identifies the first one as a slave girl. The second one is simply called “another,” but from Peter’s reply we understand that it must have been a man. The third person makes a remark about Peter’s Galilean accent. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains: “The Galileans spoke Aramaic with a heavy guttural accent. Peter could not hide his origin.” The inference that everyone who came from Galilee would be a disciple of Jesus was, of course, nonsensical. But that inconsistency did not enter Peter’s mind.

The third questioner was, probably, the most dangerous one. John gives us the detail that he was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. He remembered seeing Peter in the garden.⁷³¹ In answer to his accusation Peter resorts to cursing, invoking the Name of God in order to prove that the accuser was mistaken. Peter not only denied Jesus, he also denied the God of Israel. All this because fear had made him nervous! At that point the rooster crowed. Since, according to Mark the rooster was supposed to crow twice,⁷³² Peter must have missed the first announcement of dawn.

Peter must have been able to see Jesus most of the time through one of the windows of the hall where He was being interrogated by Annas. As the rooster crowed, Jesus turned His face toward Peter and looked straight at him. Not the crowing of the rooster, but the glance of Jesus’ eyes is what woke up Peter to the reality of his denial. He sees himself as Jesus sees him and he breaks down.

⁷²⁹ John 18:15,16

⁷³⁰ Matt. 26:35; Mark 14:31

⁷³¹ John 18:26

⁷³² Mark 14:30

The Greek text reads: “And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.” The Greek words used are *klaio*, “to sob,” or “wail aloud,” and *pikros*, “bitterly.” Matthew uses the first verb in the verse: “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel *weeping* for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”⁷³³ Peter wept a wail of death.

F. The mockery 22:63-65

63 *The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him.*

64 *They blindfolded him and demanded, “Prophesy! Who hit you?”*

65 *And they said many other insulting things to him.*

Matthew and Mark tell us in greater detail that the soldiers that guarded Jesus, while waiting for the official meeting of the Sanhedrin to begin, took the opportunity to mistreat and mock Him.⁷³⁴ They both report that they spit in Jesus’ face, which is the greatest insult one Jew can do to another. According to the Mosaic Law, spitting in someone’s face disgraces the person for a whole week.⁷³⁵

It is amazing to see how a sense of power can debase a person and corrupt interpersonal relationships. These Jewish soldiers did not know what they were doing. They were Satan’s tools. It was the devil who spit in God’s face! The taunt: “Prophesy! Who hit you?” refers to the divine gift of prophecy. The underlying insult was probably that they wanted to prove that Jesus was not the prophet He had claimed to be.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: “The treatment of Jesus by the henchmen of the Sanhedrin was wholly illegal. A prisoner was supposed to be held inviolate until he was condemned officially. But our Lord was left to the mercy of an irresponsible guard between the close of the hearing before the priests and his appearance before Pilate.” This was not the only illegality in the process that preceded Jesus’ condemnation and execution.

G. Jesus before the Sanhedrin 22:66-71

66 *At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. 67 “If you are the Christ,” they said, “tell us.” Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, 68 and if I asked you, you would not answer.*

69 *But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.”*

70 *They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You are right in saying I am.”*

71 *Then they said, “Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.”*

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, gives us the following account of the procedure: “The details of Jesus’ trial are not easy to piece together, for none of the Gospels gives a full account. But it seems clear that there were two main stages. First, there was a Jewish trial in which the chief priests had Jesus condemned according to Jewish law and tried to work out how best to get the Romans to execute him. Then a Roman trial followed in which the Jewish leaders prevailed on Pilate to sentence Jesus to crucifixion. The Jewish trial was itself in two or three stages. During the night there were informal examination before Annas (as John tells us) and Caiaphas (who had some of the Sanhedrin with him). After daybreak came a formal meeting of the Sanhedrin, probably an attempt to legitimate the decisions reached during the night. It was not lawful to conduct a trial on a capital charge at night; it was not even lawful to give the verdict at night after a trial which had been held during the day. But the Jewish hierarchy was in a hurry, so they rushed Jesus into an examination immediately after his arrest, night-time though it was. They followed this with a daytime meeting (which would give proceeding an air of legitimacy) in which the essentials of the night meeting were repeated and confirmed. Even so they came short of what was required, for a verdict of condemnation could not be given until the day after the trial ... But they appear to have thought it was worth doing and all

⁷³³ Matt. 2:18

⁷³⁴ Matt. 26:67,68; Mark 14:65

⁷³⁵ Num. 12:14

three Synoptists tell us of the day meeting (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1). Luke’s account is quite short. He omits the night-time trial and tells us only of Jesus’ appearance before the formal Sanhedrin.”

Luke only records one question put before Jesus during the trial: “Are you the Christ?” According to Matthew, it was Caiaphas who, using the strongest language possible, asked the question, whether Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of God.”⁷³⁶ Jesus did not answer the question directly, but replied with an indirect quotation from Daniel’s prophecy. Jesus actually told them that it would not make any difference to the members of the council, how He answered the question; they had already made up their minds to sentence Him to death, whatever the proceedings would prove.

Daniel wrote: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”⁷³⁷

By quoting from Daniel, Jesus told the council members that they would one day stand before Him as He stood before them and they would have to account for their actions at the only tribunal that has eternal jurisdiction.

In identifying Himself with the Person in Daniel’s vision, Jesus put to burden of proof upon the Sanhedrin. They had to come up with facts indicating that He could not be what He claimed to be. This they did not do, but they concluded instead that Jesus’ statement constituted blasphemy. According to Matthew, it was Caiaphas who formulated the charge. While doing so, he did something which it was the high priest forbidden to do: he tore his clothes.⁷³⁸

In answering the question about His divine sonship, Jesus did more than using a Hebrew idiom. The Greek text reads literally: “You say that I am.” This means more than simply “As you say!” The Apostle Paul would later formulate what would happen: “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”⁷³⁹

The question as to whether the statement made here constituted blasphemy had been brought up earlier in Jesus’ ministry and Jesus had refuted it by saying: “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are gods’? If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came — and the Scripture cannot be broken— what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”⁷⁴⁰

Commenting on Jesus’ affirmation, Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states: “These words aroused intense interest. All joined in the question that followed. Whereas before they had asked Jesus to say whether he was the Christ, now they ask the direct question, *Are you the Son of God then?* As men are sometimes called sons of God, we must understand the definite article as important (‘the’ not ‘a’ Son of God). They are asking whether Jesus claims a special relationship to God. His reference to the Son of man and to the place of God’s right hand must have seemed to them a claim to a higher place than that which they understood the Messiah to occupy. For them a claim to be the Messiah might be a mistake, but it was not blasphemy. But this was something different; it linked Jesus to deity.”

H. Jesus before Pilate 23:1-5

1 Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate.

⁷³⁶ Matt. 26:63

⁷³⁷ Dan. 7:13,14

⁷³⁸ Lev. 21:10

⁷³⁹ Phil. 2:10,11

⁷⁴⁰ John 10:34-38

2 And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king.”

3 So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied.

4 Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”

5 But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “The Jewish leaders had condemned Jesus from a variety of motives. The Pharisees saw him as a blasphemer and they smarted under his biting rebukes of their hypocrisy. The high priests doubtless found their revenues hit when he cleansed the temple and Caiaphas point out that his existence was politically inexpedient: he might cause the Romans to take away what little liberty remained to them. So for more than one reason they wanted him executed. But they lacked the power (John 18:31). Obviously Rome could not allow a subject people to use their own legal processes to kill off her supporters, so the power to inflict the death penalty remained with the governor. In this case the trouble, from the Jews’ point of view, was that Jesus’ crime was blasphemy, the claim to be the Son of God. This was not in Roman eyes an offence that merited the death penalty. So the Jews had to draw up their accusation in terms that would seem serious to the Romans. They did this by accusing Jesus of being a king, a political revolutionary.”

According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, “The Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was formed (Matt 26:3,57,59; Mark 14:53; 15:1; Luke 22:66; Acts 4:5f; 5:21; 22:30) of high priests (i.e. the acting high priest, those who had been high priests, and members of the privileged families from which the high priests were taken), elders (tribal and family heads of the people and priesthood), and scribes (i.e. legal assessors), Pharisees and Sadducees alike (compare Acts 4:1 ff; 5:17,34; 23:6).”

The action taken by this august body in the case of Jesus was, in fact, illegal. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “In capital cases judgment could not be legally pronounced on the day of trial. But in the case of Jesus, the Accused was condemned without the legal interval which should have been left between the trial and the sentence.”

Luke does not go into much detail in describing Jesus’ appearance before Pilate. *The Pulpit Commentary* states about Pilate: “Pontius Pilate, a Roman knight, owed his high position as Procurator of Judea to his friendship with Sejanus, the powerful minister of the Emperor Tiberius. He probably belonged by birth or adoption to the region of the Pontii. When Judaea became formally subject to the empire on the deposition of Archelaus, Pontius Pilate, of whose previous career nothing is known, through the interest of Sejanus, was appointed to govern it, with the title of procurator, or collector of the revenue, invested with judicial power. This was in A.D. 26, and he held the post for ten years, when he was deposed from his office in disgrace. His government of Judaea seems to have been singularly unhappy. His great patron Sejanus hated the Jews, and Pilate seems faithfully to have imitated his powerful friend. Constantly the Roman governor appears to have wounded the susceptibilities of the strange, unhappy people he was placed over. Fierce disputes, mutual insults arising out of apparently purposeless acts of arbitrary power on his side, characterized the period of his rule. His behavior in the one great event of his life, when Jesus was brought before his tribunal, will illustrate his character. He was superstitious and yet cruel; afraid of the people he affected to despise; faithless to the spirit of the authority with which he was lawfully invested. In the great crisis of his history, from the miserably selfish motive of securing his own petty interests, we watch him deliberately giving up a Man, whom he knew to be innocent, and felt to be noble and pure, to torture, shame, and death.”

Pilate’s official residence was in Caesarea. He probably had come to Jerusalem to keep an eye on the crowds gathering in the capital during the Passover celebration. The fact that he was available to hear Jesus’ case early in the morning, suggests that he had been given notice the night before, probably shortly after Jesus’ arrest.

We read in John's account of the proceedings that the Jewish leaders did not want to enter Pilate's palace, because that would make them ceremoniously unclean⁷⁴¹ and prevent them from celebrating the Passover. Pilate may have gotten used to this kind of insult to him. So the governor was obliged to come out and have the hearing of Jesus in the open.

Luke only mentions one of the charges the Jewish leaders put before Pilate against Jesus. He had advised the people to refuse paying taxes to the Roman government. All three Synoptics tell the story of how the Pharisees and Herodians had tried to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes.⁷⁴² Jesus had refuted them brilliantly. Now they twisted Jesus' answer, saying that He had told the people not to pay.

Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God was also twisted. They made it sound as if Jesus had preached rebellion against the Romans. We don't know how familiar Pilate was with the Jewish Messiah expectation. It is obvious from his attitude toward Jesus that he did not consider Jesus to fit the picture of the influential rebel leader who would be a real challenge to the emperor's authority over Palestine.

Yet, Pilate put the question directly to Jesus whether He considered Himself to be the king of the Jews. In all four Gospel accounts Jesus answers this positively. Only John gives us Jesus' complete reply: "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."⁷⁴³ To this Pilate responded with a cynical "What is truth?"⁷⁴⁴ To the Jewish leaders, Pilate announced that he found no ground for any condemnation of Jesus. He must have realized that the leaders' accusations against Jesus had nothing political, but that it was a matter of religious friction. John tells us in greater detail that Pilate used the opportunity to make the Jews feel their impotence, telling them to put Jesus to death themselves, which they were not allowed to do under Roman law.⁷⁴⁵

I. Jesus before Herod 23:6-12

6 On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean.

7 When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle.

9 He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.

10 The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him.

11 Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate.

12 That day Herod and Pilate became friends — before this they had been enemies.

Luke is the only Gospel writer who tells us about Pilate's referral of Jesus' case to King Herod, who was in Jerusalem, obviously also in connection with the Passover celebrations. Luke mentions Herod several times in his Gospel. In giving the historical background of the birth and ministry of John the Baptist,⁷⁴⁶ in connection with John's beheading⁷⁴⁷ and in reference to Herod's desire to see Jesus perform a miracle.⁷⁴⁸

When Pilate heard that Jesus originated from Galilee, which was Herod's territory, he saw a chance to rid himself of the tricky case before him. Sending Jesus to Herod would put the burden of decision on Herod's shoulders. Pilate was convinced of Jesus' innocence, but he did not have the courage to dismiss

⁷⁴¹ John 18:28

⁷⁴² Matt. 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-25

⁷⁴³ John 18:37

⁷⁴⁴ John 18:38

⁷⁴⁵ John 18:31,32

⁷⁴⁶ Luke 1:5; 3:1

⁷⁴⁷ Luke 9:7-9

⁷⁴⁸ Luke 23:8

His case for fear of the Jewish leaders, who, evidently, had some leverage on him. Sending Jesus to Herod seemed like the best solution.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes about this Herod: “*Herod* is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. He became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea on his father’s death in 4 BC and held office until AD 39. He thus ruled during most of Jesus’ lifetime over the territory in which most of Jesus’ time was spent. The word *tetrarch* strictly means a ruler of a fourth part of a region, but it came to be used of any petty prince.”

Contrary to Pilate, Herod was pleased to see Jesus, but not because of any good reasons. He hoped to see Jesus perform a miracle to satisfy his hunger for sensation. What he wanted was “a show.”

Luke does not go into any details as far as the kind of questions Herod asked Jesus. We assume they had nothing to do with the matters of which Jesus was accused by the members of the Jewish council. Herod must have felt greatly insulted by the fact that Jesus completely ignored him, refusing to give any answer to any question. This made Herod resort to ridicule. He provided “the king of the Jews” with a garment suited for the office and sent Him back to Pilate without any further comment.

Jesus’ silence before Herod was the greatest condemnation the tetrarch could have received. When God no longer speaks to a human being, there is no hope left for the individual.

To imagine how Herod must have stood before the judgment seat of Christ at the end of his own life on earth ought to fill us with horror. At this moment, King Herod saw nothing but a joke, pouring out the full measure of his derision upon the Lord of glory.

For some inexplicable reason the episode forged a friendship between Herod and Pilate. Their common bond was forged by their disrespect for the glory of God.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “Herod met the wishes of neither Pilate nor the Jews. When he could not get his miracle he ceased to be interested. He ought to have released Jesus, for he recognized his innocence (15). But he joined his warrior in mocking the prisoner (cf. 22:63ff.), then sent him back to Pilate. He had no interest in the case and he declined to try it. The *gorgeous apparel* will reflect the accusation that Jesus was king. The adjective is *lampros*, ‘bright,’ ‘shining,’ which is often used of white garments, but there is no indication of the color of this one. A cast-off royal robe is probably meant. The mockery made it plain that Herod did not take the charge seriously. That is the really frightening thing about this incident. With the Son of God before him Herod could only jest.”

J. Jesus sentenced 23:13-25

- 13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people,*
- 14 and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him.*
- 15 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death.*
- 16 Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.”*
- 18 With one voice they cried out, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!”*
- 19 (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)*
- 20 Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again.*
- 21 But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”*
- 22 For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.”*
- 23 But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed.*
- 24 So Pilate decided to grant their demand.*
- 25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.*

Luke’s description of Pilate’s sentencing of Jesus is rather brief. Many of the details found in the other Gospels are left out. Since the others do not mention Herod in connection with Jesus’ trial, that is the most outstanding feature in Luke’s account.

Pilate’s verdict about Jesus is “Not guilty!” That ought to have settled the matter. Jesus ought to have been released without any further ado. It strikes us strange that Pilate agrees to “punish” Jesus before releasing Him. Whether this involved scourging, as *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests, is not clear. Some Bible scholars believe that Pilate intended to allow the soldiers to give Jesus only some beating with a rod. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* suggests: “Pilate suggested a token scourging to ‘teach him a lesson.’” Even that would not have spoken too well of Roman justice. According to John’s Gospel, the crowd threatened blackmail Pilate by shouting: “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.”⁷⁴⁹ The leaders of the people knew how to manipulate their Roman governor.

Pilate’s suggestion to release Jesus as a gesture of goodwill failed completely. First of all, it makes little sense to release someone, as if giving a pardon, when that person is found not guilty. Bible scholars find no trace in the Hebrew system of justice of this kind of pardon. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “As a Hebrew custom, it is never mentioned save in this place. Such a release was a common incident of a Latin Lectisternium, or feast in honor of the gods. The Greeks had a similar custom at the Thesmophoria. It was probably introduced at Jerusalem by the Roman power.”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on the release of Barabbas: “The custom of releasing a prisoner at Passover (Mark 15:6; John 18:59) is not attested outside the Gospels, but this kind of thing was done elsewhere. There is nothing unlikely about it. When Pilate spoke of release the crowd immediately called for *Barabbas* (the name means ‘son of the father’). From the beginning they made it clear that it was this man, not Jesus, whom they wanted. This would no doubt have been partly because the high priests knew how to manipulate the comparatively small number who could crowd round the Praetorium, partly because the partisans of Barabbas would have taken advantage of the opportunity to try to get their friend set free, and partly because nobody would have taken seriously the thought that Jesus was a criminal. If they were having a prisoner released, let it be a real one! Barabbas was evidently a member of what we would call the resistance movement, judging from the reference to *insurrection*. No doubt the *murder* (cf. Acts 3:14) had taken place in connection with the uprising.”

Asking for the release of someone who had been imprisoned because of resistance against the Roman government was an added insult to the Roman governor.

When we look at the tumult that surrounded Jesus’ imprisonment and execution, it is easy to forget the eternal significance of what was being played out in these scenes. This is the sacrifice of “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”⁷⁵⁰ The Pharisees and Sadducees merely wanted to rid themselves of a rabbi who bothered them. They had no idea that they were putting into effect God’s solution to the problem of human sin. They were fulfilling the core message of Old Testament prophecy. This was the sacrifice of the real lamb of which all previous sacrifices had been the shadow. The Passover celebration combined with the Day of Atonement in the execution of the Son of Man. In pouring out His life into death, Jesus carried away the sin of the world.

It is not clear who first suggested the release of Barabbas, Pilate or the Jewish leaders. According to Matthew, it was Pilate who first mentioned Barabbas’ name.⁷⁵¹ The governor, evidently, thought that the crowd would vote for the release of Jesus. In this he totally misread the mentality of the Jewish leaders. In Mark’s version the request comes from the crowd.⁷⁵² John’s Gospel seems to back up Mark in this.⁷⁵³

⁷⁴⁹ John 19:12

⁷⁵⁰ Rev. 13:8

⁷⁵¹ Matt. 27:16-18

⁷⁵² Mark 15:7-11

⁷⁵³ John 18:40

We assume that Pilate had been informed about Jesus' popularity and, according to Matthew, he understood that the main reason for the people's insistence to have Jesus executed was the envy of leaders of the people.⁷⁵⁴

One moving detail Luke omits also is the effort of Pilate's wife to interfere on behalf of Jesus. We read in Matthew: "While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.'"⁷⁵⁵ It is difficult to determine whether Mrs. Pilate's dream was divinely inspired or not.

Pilate finally gives in to pressure by the crowd and, against his own good judgment, he condemns Jesus to death by crucifixion. Luke omits the gruesome details of the scourging and of Pilate's effort to change the mood of the crowd by presenting the bleeding figure of Christ before them.

K. Jesus crucified 23:26-49

1. Simon carries the cross 23:26

26 *As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.*

John tells us that Jesus carried His own cross.⁷⁵⁶ This probably means that, as Jesus was being led away, the soldiers put the crossbeam of the cross on which Jesus would die on His shoulders to carry to the place of execution. None of the Gospel writers state that Jesus collapsed under the weight of the beam. But it is obvious that Jesus was not in a condition to carry that heavy beam on His own bleeding back. He had spent a sleepless night to begin with. He had been tortured by the soldiers and physically He must have been at a point of collapse when the journey to Golgotha started. Carrying one's own cross on which the person would be executed was part of the most cruel punishment ever invented by mankind.

As Jesus stumbled and probably fell a few times, the soldiers who accompanied him and the two others who were going to be killed with Jesus, looked for help and found it in a by-passer, named Simon. Mark tells us that Simon was "the father of Alexander and Rufus."⁷⁵⁷ This suggests that Simon's sons became prominent figures in the early church. Simon from Cyrene became the first person who literally fulfilled Jesus' invitation to all to take up their cross and follow Him.⁷⁵⁸

2. The daughters of Jerusalem 23:27-31

27 *A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him.*

28 *Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.*

29 *For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'*

30 *Then "they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" '*

31 *For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"*

This section also is unique to Luke. We get the impression that the mob that wanted the sensation of seeing an execution was the larger part. The ones who bewailed Jesus were a group of women. Luke does not give us a number, but we may suppose they were a minority.

In describing the scene Luke may have wanted to give expression to his own deep grief about the suffering of Jesus, realizing that it was for the atonement of his sin that Jesus took upon Himself the cross. That was not what made these women wail, though. It was the spectacle of a worn-out, bleeding person that generated their sympathy. In answering them, Jesus borrowed an expression from the Song of Songs:

⁷⁵⁴ Matt. 27:17

⁷⁵⁵ Matt. 27:16

⁷⁵⁶ John 19:17

⁷⁵⁷ Mark 15:21

⁷⁵⁸ Matt. 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 14:27

“Daughters of Jerusalem,”⁷⁵⁹ accentuating the truth that it was the Bridegroom who took upon Himself the burden of His bride.

Knowing what would happen to Jerusalem, just a few decades after His crucifixion, Jesus’ heart was filled with compassion for the mothers who would see their infants massacred by sadistic Roman soldiers. In any war, mothers who lose their sons are the ones who suffer most.

Jesus also knew that the suffering of the daughters of Jerusalem would be the result of what was being done to Him at this moment. The words Jesus used may have been borrowed from Hosea’s prayer for the sinful nation of Israel: “Give them, O Lord— what will you give them? Give them wombs that miscarry and breasts that are dry.”⁷⁶⁰ To the Jewish mind, for a woman to be married and have children was the ultimate blessing. Women who were barren were considered to suffer the wrath of God. To call those “blessed” would be the contrary to the whole Jewish philosophy of life.

The exclamation “they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’” is also a quotation from Hosea.⁷⁶¹ John uses Hosea’s text, applying it to the final judgment. The population of the earth will cry to the mountains at Jesus’ second coming: “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!”⁷⁶²

Jesus’ words “For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” have been variously interpreted by Bible scholars. Some see in it an expression current at that time. It is obvious that Jesus refers to Himself as the “green tree,” a tree bearing fruit and in the prime of its life. The dry tree, the one that bears no fruit, would be the nation of Israel, or mankind as a whole that does not obey the will of God.

3. The crucifixion 23:32-38

32 *Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.*

33 *When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals — one on his right, the other on his left.*

34 *Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.*

35 *The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.”*

36 *The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar*

37 *and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”*

38 *There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

Leon Morris, in Luke, gives the following description of a crucifixion: “In this form of execution a person was fastened by ropes or nails to a cross (which might be shaped like our conventional cross or like a T, an X, a Y, or even an I). Jesus’ hands were nailed (John 20:25), and probably his feet also (cf. 24:39), though none of the Evangelists says so in set terms. There was a horn-like projection which the crucified straddled, which took most of the weight and stopped the flesh from tearing from the nails. The discovery of the bones of a man crucified at about the same time as Jesus raised the possibility that the legs may have been bent and twisted, then fastened to the cross by a single nail through the heels. Such a contortion of the body would have added to the agony. Crucifixion was a slow and painful death, but it is noteworthy that none of the Evangelists dwells on the torment Jesus endured.”

⁷⁵⁹ Song 2:7, etc.

⁷⁶⁰ Hos. 9:14

⁷⁶¹ Hos. 10:8^b

⁷⁶² Rev. 6:16

All four Gospels report that Jesus was crucified at the same time as two others, who were robbers. Luke calls them kakourgoi, “criminals.” John tells us that Jesus was placed in the middle.⁷⁶³ The place of crucifixion is called in Greek kranion, “skull.” Golgotha is the Aramaic term.

There is a traditional site in Jerusalem for the site, which presently is inside the walls of the old city, covered by a cathedral. There is also, just outside the city wall a place, called “Gordon’s Calvary,” which is a sheer cliff with caves. When the sun is at its height, the dark caves give it the impression of a skull. Right underneath is an ancient grotto, which was obviously used as a burial site. Whether that is the real place or not cannot be determined anymore at this time.

Luke tells us that Jesus was placed between two criminals. The Greek word he uses is kakourgoi, “wrong doers.” Matthew and Mark call them “thieves.” He is the only Gospel writer who reports Jesus’ prayer for those who crucified Him. Some Bible scholars believe that this information was added by later copyists, but there seems to be no reason to accept this.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “The garments of the crucified became the property of the soldiers who carried out the sentence. Every cross was guarded by a guard of four soldiers. The coat, for which they cast lots, was, St. John tells us, without seam. Chrysostom, who may have written from personal knowledge, thinks that the detail is added to show ‘the poorness of the Lord’s garments, and that in dress, as in all other things, he followed a simple fashion.’” It would rather seem that the undergarment was the only piece of clothing of any value. There would have been no point in casting lots over it if this were not the case. Like others who were crucified, Jesus hung on the cross naked. The Belgian poet Gezelle wrote: “All rights denied, naked He died.” He, who became the cover for the nakedness of all human sin, died in a shameful manner.

John draws our attention to the fact that the dividing of Jesus’ clothing was in fulfillment of prophecy.⁷⁶⁴ In the psalm that opens with the words “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,” David wrote: “They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.”⁷⁶⁵

Both Matthew and Mark tell us that the two robbers who were crucified with Jesus joined in insulting Jesus.⁷⁶⁶ According to Luke only one of them did. Whether this means that one of the two did not use insulting language at all, or that he began by doing so and later changed his mind, is difficult to determine.

It is also difficult to understand that this scene of terrible, inhuman suffering could bring people to the point of mocking the victim. We do not read that the two robbers were also the object of the glee of the crowd. Evidently, it was felt that, if Jesus were in fact who He had claimed to be, it would have been impossible for Him to accept this crucifixion. Islamic theologians believe that “the prophet Jesus” could not have been the one crucified. The Koran states that this was the way it seemed, but in reality it was Judas, whose appearance God had changed so that he looked like Jesus, who was hung on the cross.

The way Luke describes it, it seems as if what the soldiers did in giving wine to Jesus was part of their mockery. They may have acted as if they were cupbearers who presented the cup to the king. Matthew tells us that Jesus refused the drink after tasting it. The wine was mixed with gall, probably as a substance that would numb pain. They may have done this more for the purpose of having fewer problems in nailing Jesus to the cross than out of pity for His suffering. In doing so the soldiers did not know that they were fulfilling David’s prophetic words: “They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.”⁷⁶⁷

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Three times in the Crucifixion scene we find a mention of this vinegar, or the sour wine of the country, the common drink of the soldiers and others, being offered to the Sufferer.

⁷⁶³ John 19:18

⁷⁶⁴ John 19:24

⁷⁶⁵ Ps. 22:1, 18

⁷⁶⁶ Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32

⁷⁶⁷ Ps. 69:21

(1) Matthew 27:34. This was evidently a draught prepared with narcotics and stupefying drugs, no doubt by some of those compassionate women addressed by him on his way to the cross as ‘daughters of Jerusalem,’ a common work of mercy at that time, and one apparently permitted by the guards. This, St. Matthew tells us, ‘he tasted of,’ no doubt in courteous recognition of the kindly purpose of the act, but he refused to do more than taste of it. He would not dull the sense of pain, or cloud the clearness of his communion with his Father in that last awful hour.

(2) The second, mentioned here by St. Luke, seems to imply that the soldiers mocked his agony of thirst — one of the tortures induced by crucifixion — by lifting up to his parched, fevered lips, vessels containing their sour wine, and then snatching them hastily away.

(3) The third (John 19:28-30) relates that here the Lord, utterly exhausted, asked for and received this last refreshment, which revived, for a very brief space, his fast failing powers, and gave him strength for his last utterances. The soldiers, perhaps acting under the orders of the compassionate centurion in command, perhaps touched with awe by the brave patience and strange dignity of the dying Lord, did him this last kindly office.

No one present at the crucifixion could have understood that the cross meant the fulfillment of all Old Testament sacrifices.

Luke mentions the sign put on the cross above Jesus’ head: “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.” All four Gospel writers mention this sign, but there is a difference of wording in each of the texts. John gives us the most detailed version, which is probably the original one: “JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.”⁷⁶⁸ John also mentions that the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek, the three languages used in the Roman Empire.

4. The penitent thief 23:39-43

39 *One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"*

40 *But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"*

41 *We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."*

42 *Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."*

43 *Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."*

Matthew and Mark mention the mocking, but they make it sound as if both thieves were involved. Luke tells us that it was only one of the two. This may mean that the second thief began to mock and changed his mind later when he realized how Jesus accepted His suffering. We assume that most criminals who were executed would curse and blame God for their fate. When the second thief realized how Jesus underwent His pain, he stood in awe and understood that this Man had a relationship with God that he had never known himself. It also made him realize that he received what was due to him. He may have known more about Jesus than we can gather from the text. He may have heard about the miracles Jesus had performed and about His teaching. It seems, however, that he recognized Jesus for Who He was, “the King of the Jews,” the Messiah.

The Greek text reads literally that one of the criminals “railed” on Jesus. The Greek word used is blasphemeo, from which the English verb “to blaspheme” is derived. Matthew and Mark use the verb oneidizo, “to taunt.”⁷⁶⁹

The second thief then turned to Jesus and asked to accompany him as he dies and enters into the presence of God. Jesus answered him that he would be with Him “in paradise” the same moment he dies. Much has been written about this amazing statement. Jesus opens His statement with the word “amen,”

⁷⁶⁹ Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32

making the promise into an oath before God. And He tells him that he will be with Him “in paradise.” The Greek word used is *paradeisos*. The word is from Persian origin, meaning “garden.” It is obvious, though, that the reference here is to more than to the place where we find Adam and Eve in the beginning of the Bible story.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments: “Paradise was, in the beginning, the habitation of man in his state of innocence, in which he enjoyed that presence of his Maker which constituted his supreme happiness. Our Lord’s words intimate that this penitent should be immediately taken to the abode of the spirits of the just, where he should enjoy the presence and approbation of the Most High. The state of the blessed is certainly what our Lord here means: in what the locality of that state consists we know not. The Jews have a multitude of fables on the subject.

Although we must be careful to build a theology about life after death on this statement, it is obvious that, when the soul leaves the body, it enters into the presence of God. Whether “paradise” is a temporary abode for the soul of the believer who dies, or an in-between stage for those who await the resurrection of the body, cannot be concluded from Jesus’ words. What is obvious is that this criminal would not face judgment and condemnation when he breathed his last. Satan would have no hold on him. Those who were crucified were considered to be damned by God. Satan expected to receive three victims that day. He got only one!

It is also clear that Jesus does not speak about His return as King of kings and Lord of lords. The word “today” makes this clear. This is not, in the literal sense of the word, “My Father’s house,” about which Jesus said to His disciples: “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.”⁷⁷⁰ Otherwise the word “today” would make no sense in this context.

5. Jesus’ death 23:44-49

44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour,

45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."

48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.

49 But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

The sixth hour in Luke’s account is doubtless noon. There seems to be some confusion among the Gospel writers as far as the time of Jesus’ death is concerned. Matthew writes: “From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land,”⁷⁷¹ adding that a heavy earthquake occurred, which caused the curtain in the temple, that separated the holy place from the most holy, was torn in two. The discrepancy can probably be explained by the difference in time reckoning between the Jews and the Romans. The Jews considered the day to run from 6 PM to 6 PM; the Roman day began at 12 midnight, as our does now.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes: “Luke goes on to say that for three hours *there was darkness over the whole land*. He does not say what caused it and those translators and commentators are in error who speak of an eclipse of the sun. An eclipse is impossible at the full moon (which, of course, determined the time of the Passover), and Luke’s language should not be pressed to mean this. He is surely linking the darkness not to astronomical phenomena but to the sad events leading to the death of Jesus.” As, on the first day of creation, God created light, so here He created darkness. This was God’s darkness.

⁷⁷⁰ John 14:2

⁷⁷¹ Matt. 27:45

Of the several utterances Jesus made while hanging on the cross, Luke is the only Gospel writer who gives us the words “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” These words, like several other Jesus spoke while crucified, are a quotation from the psalms. David cried out: “Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth.”⁷⁷² The Greek verb used is *paratithemi*, which means “to deposit as a trust.”

This was a fulfillment of Jesus’ remarkable words spoken earlier: “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”⁷⁷³ Jesus did not die because of His crucifixion; He died because He commanded His Spirit to leave His body and go into the hands of the Father. No human being ever dies that way. What happened here was in fulfillment of what the author of Hebrews calls “the eternal covenant.”⁷⁷⁴ Before the creation of time there was an agreement between the Father and the Son. The Son would come to earth and take upon Himself the condemnation for all human sin and the Father promised to restore Him to life after He died.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states about Jesus last words: “Matthew and Mark emphasize the terrible nature of the death Jesus died for sinners with the words, ‘My God, my God, who hast thou forsaken me?’ (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). Luke is not saying this, but he is not denying this insight either. He is stressing that in the terrible death died, paradoxically, Jesus was at one with the Father, he was doing the will of the Father. The word rendered *breathed his last, exepneusen*, is not the normal one for saying that someone has died. In fact none of the Evangelists says ‘Jesus died,’ which may be part of the way they bring out the truth that in Jesus’ death there was something most unusual.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “This placing his spirit as a trust in the Father’s hands is, as [one Bible scholar] phrases it, an expression of the profoundest and most blessed repose after toil. ‘It is finished!’ has already told us that the struggling and combat were sealed and closed for ever. Doctrinally it is a saying of vast importance; for it emphatically asserts that the soul will exist apart from the body *in the hands of God*. This at least is its proper home. The saying has been echoed on many a saintly death-bed. Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, in his great agony shows us the form of this blessed prayer we should properly use for ourselves at that supreme hour, when he asked the *Lord Jesus* to receive his spirit, and then fell asleep. Thus coming to the Son, we come through him to the Father. Huss, on his way to the stake, when his enemies were triumphantly giving over his soul to devils, said with no less theological accuracy than with sure, calm faith, ‘But I commit my spirit into thy hand, O Lord Jesus Christ, who hast redeemed it.’”

The centurion was the Roman officer in charge of Jesus’ execution. He must have seen many die at his hand. This was the first time he saw a marked difference in the way Jesus entered death. The way we die may be the greatest testimony of our life we can leave behind. During the Second World War, the brother of a friend of mine was execution by the Nazis for helping escape a British pilot, who had been shot down over the Netherlands. He was caught and condemned to death. As he was led away to be shot, he sang the psalm verse: “Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight.”⁷⁷⁵

We read that this Roman officer “praised God” when he saw how Jesus died. Matthew and Mark give his words as: “Surely he was the Son of God!”⁷⁷⁶ That may have been what the man literally said. Luke gives us rather what he meant than what he said. We must not interpret this as if this heathen man had any theological insight into the Person of Jesus Christ. It is obvious, however, that he understood more about Jesus than the Jews did.

It is difficult for us to understand why people would come to look at a crucifixion. There is in the human heart a weird tendency to take pleasure in looking at someone else’s suffering.

⁷⁷² Ps. 31:5

⁷⁷³ John 10:17,18

⁷⁷⁴ Heb. 13:20

⁷⁷⁵ Ps. 43:4

⁷⁷⁶ Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, states about the crowd that had come to watch: “The multitude will be the Jerusalemites who had no great interest in Jesus but who had come to watch the execution. Instead of being entertained they were saddened by it all and went home *beating their breasts* in grief. ... Curiously Luke does not mention the effect on Jesus’ followers. He tells us that some of them were there and characteristically he singles out certain women for special mention. But he tells us only that these people *stood at a distance* (it may not have been polite to come too close) *and saw these things*.” Morris’ remark about “politeness” strikes me as strange in this context.

L. The burial of Jesus 23:50-56

50 *Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man,*

51 *who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God.*

52 *Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body.*

53 *Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid.*

54 *It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.*

55 *The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it.*

56 *Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.*

All four Gospel writers mention Joseph from Arimathea. Mark states that he was “a prominent member of the Council,”⁷⁷⁷ that is the Sanhedrin. This tells us that the vote to condemn Jesus to death had not been unanimous. Some Bible scholars believe that Joseph may not have participated at all in the case against Jesus, that he had not even been present during the meetings. Luke’s mention that he “had not consented to their decision and action” rather suggests that he had been present, but voted against it. Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: “He must have been absent, for the vote was unanimous (note the ‘all’ of 22:70; Mark 14:64).”

The location of Arimathea is unknown nowadays. It must have been in the close vicinity of Jerusalem, since Joseph owned the gravesite where Jesus was buried.

Being an important member of the Jewish council, Joseph had little difficulty to get an emergency audience with Pilate, who gave Joseph permission to bury Jesus. Joseph may not have been aware of the fact that he was fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy: “He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.”⁷⁷⁸ John tells us: “Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews.”⁷⁷⁹

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “In Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus we have specimens of a class of earnest and devout Jews, perhaps not uncommon at that time — men who respected and admired our Lord as a Teacher, and half believed in him as the Messiah (the Christ), aside yet from many mixed and various motives shrank from confessing him before men till after the cross had been endured.”

There was, just outside the city of Jerusalem a hill, which we mentioned earlier, with a perpendicular side that has a number of caves. When the sun is at its height, the black shadows of the caves make it look like a human skull. At the bottom of, what is called “Gordon’s Calvary” there is a small grave, hewn out of the rock. This may have been the actual place of Jesus’ burial. If it is not, it gives us a good impression what Jesus’ tomb must have looked like.

⁷⁷⁷ Mark 15:43

⁷⁷⁸ Isa. 53:9

⁷⁷⁹ John 19:38

If Jesus died around three o'clock in the afternoon on Friday, only a few hours were left before the beginning of the Sabbath at six PM. Evidently, this was just enough to get Jesus' body down from the cross, wash it, and prepare Him for the burial.

Luke tells us "It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin." John adds that it was not just a preparation for a Sabbath, but "Preparation of Passover Week."⁷⁸⁰ That was the feast of unleavened bread.

Some women accompanied the men for Jesus' hasty burial. Matthew identifies them as "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary."⁷⁸¹ Mark calls "the other Mary," "Mary the mother of James."⁷⁸² Mark also mentions Salome as one of the women who went to the tomb the day after the Sabbath.⁷⁸³ That may mean that Salome was there on the day of the burial also. Luke also mentions a certain Johanna in the next chapter. These women planned to finish the embalment of Jesus' body on Sunday, little remembering Jesus' promise of His resurrection. One Bible scholars calls the Sabbath that kept the women from finishing their work "the last Sunday of the Old Testament."

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes about the preparation of the body: "The women went off to the place where they were staying and prepared the necessary ingredients for a proper anointing when the sabbath had passed. Their preparations completed, they complied with the Law and rested on the sabbath. In John the spices Nicodemus brought were buried with the body, in Luke the women prepared spices before the sabbath, in Mark they brought them after the sabbath, while in Matthew there is nothing about the spices at all. Perhaps we should understand all this to mean that the burial on the Friday had to be hurried, but that use was made of the spices that were to hand. Then the faithful women, before and after the sabbath, did what was necessary to complete the burial."

12. THE RESURRECTION 24:1-53

A. The appearance to the women 24:1-11

1 *On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.*

2 *They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,*

3 *but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.*

4 *While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.*

5 *In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"*

6 *He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:*

7 *'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'*

8 *Then they remembered his words.*

9 *When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.*

10 *It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.*

11 *But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.*

In introducing this last chapter of the book, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "All the four evangelists give an account of the Resurrection. None of the four, however, attempt to give a *history* of it simply from a human point of sight. Each Gospel probably reproduces the special points dwelt on in certain great centers

⁷⁸⁰ John 19:31

⁷⁸¹ Matt. 27:61

⁷⁸² Mark 15:47

⁷⁸³ Mark 16:1

of Christian teaching, in what we should now term different schools of thought. (Attempts have been made by theological scholars to *classify* these as Jewish, Gentile, Greek, Roman; but only with indifferent success). The teaching which St. Matthew's Gospel represents, evidently in the Resurrection preaching dwelt with peculiar insistence on the great Galilaeen appearance of the Risen. St. Luke confines himself exclusively to the appearance in Judaea. St. John chooses for his Resurrection instruction scenes which had for their theatre both Galilee and Judaea. St. John, as his central or most detailed piece of teaching, dwells on a fishing scene on Gennesaret, the actors being the well-known inner circle of the apostles. While St. Luke chooses for his detailed Resurrection narrative a high-road in a Jerusalem suburb; and for actors, two devoted, but historically unknown, disciples.

Then there is no question of *discrepancies* in this portion of the great history. It is not easy to frame a perfectly satisfactory harmony of all the events related by the four, after the Lord had risen; for, in fact, we possess no detailed account or history of what took place in that eventful period in presence of the disciples. We simply have memoranda of eye-witnesses of certain *incidents* connected with the Resurrection selected by the great first teachers as specially adapted to their own preaching and instruction."

If the day before can be called "the last Sabbath of the Old Testament," this Sunday was the first Sunday of the New. It was the resurrection of Jesus on this day that made the early Christians celebrate the first day of the week instead of keeping the Sabbath as the Jews had been doing in the Old Testament. This Sunday was the beginning of God's new dispensation.

No one was present to witness the resurrection. The guards who had been placed by the tomb as the members of the Sanhedrin had requested, fled when an angel came down and rolled the stone away. Matthew reports that "There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it." And: "The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men."⁷⁸⁴ They were given hush-money by the Jewish council.

Mark tells us that as the women were on their way to the tomb, they asked themselves how they would be able to roll away the stone from the entrance of the grave. But when they arrived at the site, they found it already had been rolled away.⁷⁸⁵ It seems that they did not immediately see the angel. The Lord had to open their eyes before they could see this spiritual being. Luke mentions two angels, where the other Evangelists only mention one. That one was probably the one who spoke to them.

It is obvious that the rolling away of the stone was not done for Jesus' benefit. Since He was able, in His resurrection body, to enter the upper room where the disciples were gathered and where the doors were closed,⁷⁸⁶ He could certainly leave the tomb, even with the stone covering the entrance. The stone had been rolled away as a testimony for the women and the disciples.

If the account of the four Evangelists about the events of that day differ from each other, although none contradicts the other, it indicates how much excitement there must have been that day among those who met the risen Lord.

The angel's question to the women is beautifully phrased: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Jesus had clearly told His disciples that He would rise on the third day. Evidently, no one believed Him. His death on the cross had affected them so deeply that those words were completely wiped away from their memory. As far as the angels were concerned, all the disciples ought to have been at the gravesite early that morning. They must not have been able to understand how final "death" appears to humans.

When the angels quoted Jesus' words back to the women, they remembered Him saying them and they believed that the miracle of resurrection had taken place. So they returned to the place where the disciples had spent the night and reported the greatest news that was ever told. The disciples had witnessed several resurrections of the dead, as Jesus had called them back to life, but they could not believe that the One who had declared Himself "the resurrection and the life" would rise from the dead Himself. The women must

⁷⁸⁴ Matt. 28:1, 4

⁷⁸⁵ Mark 16:2

⁷⁸⁶ John 19:20, 26

have quoted Jesus' words about His own suffering and resurrection, as the angel had told them, but this they did not believe those either. They were still emotionally too upset to allow hope to enter their hearts.

Luke identifies the women as "Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them." Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes about this: "Luke lists the names of some of the women. *Mary Magdalene*, the first to see the risen Lord (cf. Mark 16:9), is mentioned in each of the four Gospels in the resurrection narrative. But apart from her connection with the crucifixion and resurrection we hear of her only in 8:2 ... *Joanna* is mentioned only here and in 8:2 ... 'James' Mary' (as Mark 16:1) would normally be taken as 'Mary, the wife of James' but RSV's *the mother of James* is probably correct (cf. Mark 15:40); she appears to be 'the other Mary' (of Matt. 28:1). These and *the other women* (who will include Salome, Mark 16:1) told the apostles what they had seen and heard. But the lordly males were not impressed. They thought the story 'nonsense' (NEB), *and they did not believe them*. The apostles were not men poised on the brink of belief and needing only the shadow of an excuse before launching forth into a proclamation of resurrection. They were utterly skeptical. Even when women they knew well told them of their experiences, they refused to believe. Clearly irrefutable evidence was needed to convince these skeptics."

B. Peter at the tomb 24:12

12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

We read in John's Gospel that both Peter and John went to the tomb to check out whether the story of the women made any sense.⁷⁸⁷ According to John, he ran faster than Peter but it was Peter who entered the tomb first. They both saw the windings that had been used for the burial, which were lying there as an empty cocoon. Those that had been wrapped around Jesus' head were apart from the rest. John states "He saw and believed," not clarifying whether he believed that Jesus was raised from the dead or that the women's tale was nonsense. The position of the grave cloths, still having the form of Jesus' body, but empty must have been a sight for which no natural explanation could be given.

C. The walk to Emmaus 24:13-35

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;

16 but they were kept from recognizing him.

17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast.

18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

19 "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.

20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;

21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.

22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning

23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.

⁷⁸⁷ John 20:3-10

24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"

26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther.

29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.

31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together

34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."

35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

This story also is unique to Luke. It is generally considered to be one of the most exquisite fragments in the resurrection story. Nothing is known of the two men who walked on the road to Emmaus, except that one of them was called Cleopas. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: "Cleopas was the husband of one of the Marys (John 19:25), and was possibly the father of James the Less (Luke 24:10). He may have been Luke's informant." Luke speaks of the two as if they were part of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples (two of them), but we know that this was not the case. They must have been followers of Christ, but they were not among those Jesus had chosen as part of His group. They were probably on their way home after celebrating the Passover at the temple in Jerusalem.

There is a touch of divine humor in the whole situation. Here are two men discussing the events that led to Jesus' death and Jesus joins them to participate in their conversation. It is always interesting to hear what others say about our person, as long as the discussion is of a positive character. These men, obviously, believed that Jesus was "a prophet." They may have believed that He was *the prophet* Moses had prophesied about.⁷⁸⁸ His death had made no sense to them. Although they may have been familiar with John the Baptist's statement that Jesus was "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,"⁷⁸⁹ they did not understand what that meant. Jesus' own prophecies about His death and resurrection had not made an impression upon them either.

Jesus' death was the only topic of their conversation during the, about two-hour-long, walk home. And here the living Christ joins them, asking them what they were talking about.

There answer was, "Why do you ask? What else could we talk about than the terrible things that happened in Jerusalem over the last weekend?"

They must have been with the eleven when the women came and reported having seen an angel and receiving word of Jesus' resurrection, but they had not believed that any more than the disciples did. They knew about Peter and John's visit to the grave. They could not even hope that the story of His resurrection was true. They believed death was the final thing that happened to any human being. They must have heard about the miracles of resurrection Jesus had performed Himself, but they could not believe that He could be resurrected Himself.

⁷⁸⁸ Deut. 18:15, 18

⁷⁸⁹ John 1:29

They told Jesus “we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.” The Greek word Luke uses for “to redeem” is *lutroo*, which has the basic meaning of “to ransom.” Both Paul and Peter use the word in their epistles, giving it the meaning of a sacrifice.⁷⁹⁰ Yet, they failed to understand what they believed to be true about the Christ.

In answering their doubts Jesus shows no sympathy for their lack of understanding, stating that they could have known and should have known. He calls them “fools,” and “slow of heart.” The Greek word used for “fool” is *anoetos*, “unintelligent.” We could say “stupid.”

Then Jesus gives them, what is probably the greatest exposition of Old Testament Messianic truth ever given. One would wish that these two men had made notes which had been preserved throughout the ages. As a man, Jesus was the only human being who had the key to unlock the mysteries of Old Testament prophecy. We know and understand some of the Old Testament verses that speak of the Messiah and His suffering, but no one understood them as Jesus did. He knew and had applied to Himself David’s prophecy: “Here I am, I have come — it is written about me in the scroll.”⁷⁹¹ *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “In studying the Scriptures for himself, he had found himself in them everywhere (... John 5:39, 40).”

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments: “Jesus began a systematic Bible study. *Moses and all the prophets* formed the starting-point, but he also went on to the things that referred to himself *in all the scriptures*. The picture we get is of the Old Testament as pointing to Jesus in all its parts. Luke gives no indication of which passages the Lord chose, but he makes it clear that the whole Old Testament was involved. We should perhaps understand this not as the selection of a number of proof-texts, but rather as showing that throughout the Old Testament a consistent divine purpose is worked out, a purpose that in the end meant and must mean the cross. The terribleness of sin is found throughout the Old Testament and so is the deep, deep love of God. In the end this combination made Calvary inevitable. The two had wrong ideas of what the Old Testament taught and thus they had wrong ideas about the cross.”

As they arrived at their home, Jesus acted as if He wanted to go on. The Greek word Luke uses is *prospondeomai*, which can be rendered “to pretend.” This is the only place in the New Testament where this verb occurs. The obvious meaning is that Jesus wanted to be invited. God never forces Himself upon anybody; He only enters our lives if we open the door for Him.⁷⁹² Quoting another Bible scholar, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “How many are there ... to whom he has drawn near, but *with* whom he has not tarried, because they have suffered him to ‘go away again,’ in his living and heart-moving words! How comparatively rare is it for men to reach the full blessing they might receive (see, for example, the striking historical instance ... 2 Kings 13:14, 19)!”

They insisted that He come in and spend the night with them. So He came in but He did not spend the night in their home. At the evening meal, Jesus took the bread and prayed for a blessing over the food. It was Jesus’ habit to thank the Father for the food He ate. We read at the feeding of the five thousand: “looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.”⁷⁹³ What was unusual though was that Jesus, being the guest in that home, acted as if He were the Master. *Barnes’ Notes* writes about the role Jesus plays here: “This was the office of the master of a feast, and perhaps this first attracted particularly their attention. Though he was in ‘their’ house, yet he acted as ‘master’ of the feast, as he used to do with them before his death. Perhaps, also, as he ‘gave’ them the bread, they observed the ‘prints’ in his hands, and they knew that it was Jesus. This was not a ‘sacramental,’ but a common supper; yet our Savior sought a blessing on the food, and thus set an example to all his followers to acknowledge God in their daily gifts, and to seek his benediction in all their enjoyments.”

The fact that the scars of the crucifixion were still visible on Jesus’ resurrection body makes us wonder if our physical idiosyncrasies will remain in our own resurrection. For people who were born with birth defects or who were severally maimed in accidents, that would be a strange experience. Jesus’ body may be the exception in heaven; but it could be that that which is our burden here below may become our glory above.

⁷⁹⁰ Titus 2:14; I Peter 1:18

⁷⁹¹ Ps. 40:7

⁷⁹² Rev. 3:20

⁷⁹³ Matt. 14:19; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16; John 6:11

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Jesus' breaking of the bread: "There was a deep significance in the concluding act of this memorable appearance of the risen Lord. This taking the bread, and blessing it, and breaking it, and then giving it to them, was no ordinary act of courtesy, or welcome, or friendship, which, from a master or teacher might be shown to his disciples. It resembles too closely the great sacramental act in the upper room, when Jesus was alone with his apostles, for us to mistake its solemn sacramental character."

We read earlier, when they first encountered Jesus walking on the road: "they were kept from recognizing him." That seems to mean more than just their failure to realize whom they were talking with; it was a divine act that kept them from seeing who was with them. Now that inability was lifted from them and God allowed them to see. It wasn't just that they were able to recognize the One who had been explaining the mysteries of the Messiah's role, but they had met the risen Savior of Israel and of the world. At the moment of realization Jesus disappeared from their sight. This was another indication of the new way a resurrection body was able to move through space. None of the limitations of the old mortal body were operative anymore in this new creation. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: "The risen Christ seemed to have the ability to appear and disappear at will. His resurrected body possessed powers that transcended the laws of ordinary matter."

The two men did not experience Jesus' disappearance as a loss; they began to realize what kind of miracle they had just experienced. It was the most inspiring and enriching event that had ever happened to them. By then it was night, but this did not keep them from walking all the way back to Jerusalem to seek the disciples and tell them what happened to them.

They must have been well-known to the Eleven because, as they entered they were greeted with the words: "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." This personal meeting with Simon Peter is recorded nowhere in detail. We may suppose that Peter's denial of Christ had something to do with it. It gave Peter the opportunity to ask for forgiveness and to Jesus to give forgiveness.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, writes: "Their immediate reaction was to tell the other believers. They seem not to have completed their meal, for they left *that same hour* (which means 'straight away' rather than 'within an hour'). The argument they had used with Jesus about the lateness of the hour apparently did not weigh with them at all now. In Jerusalem they found *the eleven* and other disciples with them, though Luke does not say who they were. But they were full of the news of the resurrection, for the Lord *has appeared to Simon* (cf. 1 Cor. 15:5). They had not been prepared to take the word of the women, but Simon was different. If he said he had seen Jesus, then *The Lord has risen indeed*. So Cleopas and his friends told of their walk with Jesus and of his becoming known *in the breaking of the bread*. The manner of his becoming known had clearly impressed them."

Luke states that they found "the eleven," but according to John's account, Thomas was absent during this meeting.⁷⁹⁴

D. The appearance to the disciples 24:36-45

36 *While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."*

37 *They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.*

38 *He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?"*

39 *Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."*

40 *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.*

41 *And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"*

42 *They gave him a piece of broiled fish,*

⁷⁹⁴ John 20:24

43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

Jesus' appearance in the midst of His disciples was another miracle of resurrection power. His body was not limited in its movement by closed doors or other material obstructions. This new body could move through the walls! The gathered disciples did not even have to move to make place for Him. All of a sudden they found Jesus standing in the midst of them. John mentions particularly that the doors were locked.⁷⁹⁵ He greets them with the customary "Shalom!" In modern language this would be the equivalent of "Good evening!" Although the meaning of our daily greetings has lost its impact because of routine use, there are moments at which greetings become very meaningful. This was one of those moments. Greetings are originally meant to pronounce a blessing upon someone. One of the most meaningful greeting I know of is used in the south of Germany, where people say to each other "Grüsst Gott!" (God greets you!). Jesus not only greeted His disciples, He commanded peace on them and in them.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, observes about this encounter: "It is not surprising that the disciples *were startled*. After all, to have the risen Lord suddenly appear in their midst must have been something of a shock. That they were *frightened* is not quite so explicable. They had just been telling the two from Emmaus that 'The Lord has risen indeed.' But it is one thing to accept such a statement on the word of someone else about an absent Person and quite another to accept it for oneself when the Person is suddenly present despite locked doors. Small wonder that they *supposed that they saw a spirit*, i.e. a ghost! Their fear was the natural reaction to the supernatural.

Jesus proceeded to calm and reassure his followers. First he asked the reason for their being *troubled* and for their *questionings*. He takes their doubts out into the open and deals with them. The invitation to handle him and the reference to *flesh and bones* show that Jesus' resurrection body had physical aspects, or at least that it could conform at will to physical laws. *See my hands and my feet* is probably an invitation to look at the marks of his wounds as a means of verifying that it was Jesus himself who stood before them. To handle him would show them that he was not a ghost ... [the words] indicate that Jesus did what his words implied and showed the disciples where the nail prints were."

The Pulpit Commentary states about this appearance of the risen Christ: "The first words quietly told the awe-struck ones to look closely at him, and to ascertain from the dread marks he bore that what they looked upon was Jesus their Master. Then he proceeded to bid them touch him, handle him, and so assure themselves that it was no phantom, no bodiless spirit, that stood before them. These words of the Lord, and the invitation, 'handle me, and see,' made the deepest impression on the hearers. These, then, were proofs of the Resurrection that admitted of no shadow of doubt. These words, this sight, changed their lives. What cared they afterwards for men and men's threatenings? Death, life, to them were all one. They had *seen* the Lord, they had handled with their hands" (see ...1 John 1:1)."

Jesus mentions His "flesh and bones" as proof of the fact that He was not a spirit but that He possessed a human body. Some Bible scholar deduct from the fact that He does not mention "blood" that the resurrection body is bloodless. That fact can neither be proven or disproven. The Old Testament teaches that "life is in the blood."⁷⁹⁶ In the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, the Apostle Paul gives us a lengthy description of the resurrection body, but we cannot conclude from that either whether the new body has blood or not. It is obvious that one can see whether a body has flesh and bone. If blood becomes visible it means that the body is wounded. That may be one reason that Jesus does not mention blood. But this either does not provide proof.

The disciples' reaction to seeing Jesus was, obviously, that it was too good to be true. This was more than an impression that He had never died, because He had died before their very eyes. They needed no proof of that. Here was a Person who had gone through death and had come through victoriously. They were more than surprised. The wonder of His resurrection was even a glorious joy for Jesus Himself.

⁷⁹⁵ John 20:19

⁷⁹⁶ Lev. 17:11,14, etc.

Revealing Himself to the Apostle John later, we read that He said to His beloved disciples: “I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!”⁷⁹⁷ Paul and John call Him: “the firstborn” from the dead.⁷⁹⁸ The author of Hebrews states that Jesus’ resurrection was one of the main reasons for His incarnation. That was why He had to come into the world and acquire a mortal human body. We read: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”⁷⁹⁹ The disciples may not have been able to digest all these deep and wonderful truths, but they must have felt some of the marvel of it all.

Jesus’ sudden presence among them was so overwhelming that they were unable to speak or move. In order to break the spell, Jesus asked for something to eat. The disciples gave Him a piece of broiled fish, probably a leftover of what they had been eating themselves. The older versions add that they also gave Him a piece of a honeycomb. The point was not to prove that the resurrection body needs food to stay alive, but that His body was real, actually more real than any of the mortal frames we live in on earth.

E. The fulfillment of Scripture 24:44-49

44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,

47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

48 You are witnesses of these things.

49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Jesus referred to Old Testament prophecies about His death and resurrection of which the disciples failed to understand the meaning. It is not difficult for us to find references to the suffering of the Messiah in the Old Testament, but to find predictions about His resurrection, and especially about the third day, we have to go through the Old Testament with a fine toothcomb. The closest we may come is probably Hosea’s prophecy: “He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.”⁸⁰⁰

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on these words: “The fulfillment of Scripture is one of Luke’s major themes. He sees God as having set out his purpose in these ancient writing and then as bringing to pass what he had foreshadowed. He was not frustrated by the machinations of wicked people.

These are my words means, ‘These happenings, specifically the resurrection, represent the outworking of the things I taught you.’ Jesus had included in his teaching enough foreshadowings of the passion and resurrection for his followers not to have been surprised at what had happened. He can say, *while I was still with you*, for his presence now (and on other occasions like this) was exceptional. The definitive break had taken place and he no longer abode on earth. The solemn division of Scripture *the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms* (the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible) indicate that there is no part of Scripture that does not bear its witness to Jesus. This incidentally appears to be the only place in the New Testament where this threefold division is explicitly mentioned.”

V.45 is one of the great encouraging verses in the New Testament. As Jesus opened the minds of the disciples “so they could understand the Scriptures,” so the Holy Spirit is willing to open our minds when we read the written Word of God. It has been the experience of many that, once they surrendered

⁷⁹⁷ Rev. 1:18

⁷⁹⁸ Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5

⁷⁹⁹ Heb. 2:14,15

⁸⁰⁰ Hos. 6:1,2

their lives to the control of the Holy Spirit, the Bible became a living book, the Word of God that speaks to them personally. John adds: “he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”⁸⁰¹

The gift of the Holy Spirit was not only meant for the disciples to understand the Scriptures, but also to endow them with the power and insight to preach the message of repentance and forgiveness. Jesus’ public ministry on earth began with the preaching of this message.⁸⁰² Here He conveys His burden to His disciples.

The new feature in this message is that forgiveness is available in the Name of Jesus. It is the fact that Jesus paid the price for all human sin that provides a blank check of forgiveness upon one’s recognition of this payment. In the words of the Apostle Paul: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”⁸⁰³ The Name of Jesus is the divine element that makes this preaching authentic and effective. It is like the ring of the Old Testament kings that make a document authoritative. Thus Mordecai received authority from the king of Persia to issue royal decrees.⁸⁰⁴

John is more explicit in reporting Jesus’ command, adding: “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”⁸⁰⁵ There is much more authority in the preaching of the Gospel than most people realize.

The scope of preaching which the Apostles were ordained to perform was the whole world. Geographically it began in Jerusalem, but it was to reach every tribe and language on this globe. We are still trying to comply with this “great commission.” Christ’s return to earth is dependant upon our obedience to this command. Jesus’ words in Matthew are: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”⁸⁰⁶

God’s plan is that ultimately there will be before the throne in heaven people “from every tribe and language and people and nation,”⁸⁰⁷ bringing their worship to the Lamb.

Probably, the most important part of the commission is the promise of the Holy Spirit, without who’s endowment no ministry would have any meaning. This is put more clearly in John’s Gospel where we read: “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”⁸⁰⁸ These men had all lived in close fellowship with Jesus throughout the years of His ministry and they all could say, as John puts it: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”⁸⁰⁹ Yet, they would not be able to accomplish anything without Christ being in them, which is what the Holy Spirit would make possible.

They were going to be “clothed with power from on high.” This would happen on the day of Pentecost, just a few weeks after Jesus spoke these words. Luke would describe this in fuller detail in the next book he probably planned to write already at this point.

F. The ascension 24:50-53

50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them.

51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.

⁸⁰¹ John 20:22

⁸⁰² Matt. 3:2

⁸⁰³ II Cor. 5:21

⁸⁰⁴ Esther 8:8,10

⁸⁰⁵ John 20:23

⁸⁰⁶ Matt. 24:14

⁸⁰⁷ Rev. 5:9

⁸⁰⁸ John 15:26,27

⁸⁰⁹ 1 John 1:1-3

52 Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Luke makes here a jump to an event that would happen several weeks after the gathering described in the previous verses. He makes is sound as if Jesus took the disciples out that same hour.

There are several problems connected with the text before us. One of them being the mention of Bethany, which would be approximately two miles from the place where Jesus spoke with the disciples. It would also suggest that the ascension took place in the evening, which is in the dark.

Leon Morris, in *Luke*, comments on this: “There is no time note and some have thought that Luke is picturing the ascension as taking place on Easter Day. But, quite apart from the difficulty inherent in the idea that Jesus would have led his followers from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives late at night for this purpose, we should not see a contradiction of Luke’s own words in Acts 1:3. There we learn that forty days elapsed between the resurrection and the ascension. *Bethany* was on the slopes of the Mount of Olives and the ascension took place from somewhere on this hill. Luke describes the event very simply. He speaks only of Jesus as being parted from the disciples during the act of blessing them. [He] (‘happened to be parted from them’ is a very unfortunate translation).’ NEB and others omit the words ‘and was carried up into heaven.’”

The other problem is that, in the opening of *The Book of Acts*, Luke states: “He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”⁸¹⁰ If the ascension happened forty days after the day of resurrection, than it could not have occurred on the evening of the day Jesus rose from the dead. The idea that Luke would contradict himself would be ridiculous.

The simplest solution is to read last four verses of Luke’s Gospel as a condensation of events that spread out over several weeks. According to the Levitical calendar the year began with the Passover celebration, commemorating Israel’s exodus from Egypt. This was followed by the feast of presentation of the first fruit, which was forty days later. Pentecost was to be celebrated fifty days after the first fruit presentation.⁸¹¹ The Greek word *pentecoste* means “fifty.”

The fact that Jesus ascended to heaven on the day of presentation of the first fruit gives a deep spiritual meaning to that Old Testament law. He was “the first fruit,” the fruit of resurrection, of victory over Satan and death. The result of His resurrection was the birth of the church on the day of celebration of the harvest, when the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles. The Apostle Paul calls Jesus: “the firstborn from among the dead.”⁸¹² And the author of Hebrews calls us: “the church of the firstborn,”⁸¹³ which may apply either to Jesus Christ’s resurrection or to ours.

Jesus’ last command to the disciples was to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism with the Holy Spirit. That word was spoken on the day of His resurrection. His blessing and subsequent ascension occurred forty days later. Their seven week’s wait was mostly in the temple, where they spend their time in joyful praise and worship. At this point they all worshipped their Master as their Lord and their God, as Thomas called Him.

⁸¹⁰ Acts 1:3

⁸¹¹ Lev. 23:15,16

⁸¹² Col. 1:18

⁸¹³ Heb. 12:23