

Beginning Our Journey With Luke

Luke 1:1-4

Today we begin the Jesus Journey. We are going to take a trip with Luke as our tour guide as he shows us what Jesus did and taught. The gospel of Luke is the longest of the four gospels. Further, it is the only gospel with a sequel, as Luke writes with the intent to continue the story in the book called Acts. Luke not only introduces Jesus and his ministry, but also shows how this ministry relates to the early church era. Despite the separation of the two books, Luke lays the foundation for many issues that are answered in Acts. Most believe that both the gospel from Luke and Acts were written in 62 AD, since this is when the Acts narrative concludes. There is not much information recorded about Luke, but the few lines we do have give us great insight into who Luke was. First, Luke is a Greek name, so Luke is not a Jew. Further, Luke writes in proper Greek with the formality of a historian. The first four verses of this gospel is one long, careful constructed sentence in the tradition of the finest historical works in Greek literature (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*). Scholars of Greek consider Luke's writings to be superb in style and in structure. Second, we know that Luke was a traveling companion with the apostle Paul. There are many places in the Acts narrative where Luke slips into writing about what "we" had done rather than Paul. Luke is including himself in part of the action of the story. Third, the apostle Paul calls Luke a doctor in Colossians 4:14. It becomes clear that Luke is a very educated and knowledgeable.

The Gospel's Purpose

Before we dive into the Jesus Journey with Luke as our guide, it is important to frame the purpose and direction of this gospel. Before going on a trip it is useful to know where we are going and where our destination is. The purpose of Luke's gospel can be framed in four general questions that Luke is going to answer in his narratives of this gospel and Acts.

1. How could Gentiles be included as God's people on an equal basis with Jews, extending even to matters like table fellowship and the exclusion of circumcision? This is essentially a question of salvation. Does a Gentile really belong in this new community and are recipients of God's blessings?

2. How could it be said that God's plan was at work when the Jews, the most natural recipients, largely responded negatively? The Jews persecuted Christians who preached God's hope to them. How could it be that Jesus be the Messiah and yet the nation of Israel reject Jesus? Why was God's plan meeting so much hostility? How could God's plan and God's messengers meet so much hostility? Can God really be behind a community that faces so much hostility and rejection?

3. What was the person of Jesus and his teaching all about? How could Jesus be the hope of God if he was crucified? How could Jesus, despite his physical absence, continue to exercise a presence and represent the hope of God? How could a crucified person bring the fulfillment of God's promises?

4. What does it mean to respond to Jesus? What is required, what can one expect in making such a commitment, and how should one live until the day Jesus returns and the hope is realized? What are believers and the new community to be? Chapters 9-19 especially deal with these concerns. The gospel of Luke spends most of its time addressing this fourth question, while touching on the other three questions. The book of Acts deals with the first three questions primarily, while also touching on the fourth question. (*Baker Exegetical Commentary*)

I hope that we can see that these are critical questions that our world today also has in mind about Jesus. These are answers that we need to give to people as we teach. Who is this Jesus and why is he important? How is Jesus the fulfillment of God's plan? What does it mean to respond to Jesus? How does a crucified Jesus do anything for me in my life? This is the journey that we are about to embark upon with Luke as our guide.

Luke is going to record for us a number of statements and stories showing us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the hope of Israel, which is most highlighted in the first four chapters. God has been faithful to his promises to the nation of Israel and to the world. Thus, the overarching theme of Luke and Acts is this: **Since Jesus is Lord of all (proven in the book of Luke), salvation and the gospel message can go to all (proven in the book of Acts).**

Unique Nature of Luke's Gospel

Luke follows a unique geographical pattern. While Matthew and Mark spend almost all of their writing describing Jesus' Galilean ministry, Luke devotes only five chapters to Galilee. The major portion of Luke covers Jesus' travels toward Jerusalem (nearly 10 lengthy chapters). Matthew and Mark only devote one chapter each to this part of Jesus' ministry. Luke is divided into four major sections:

1:1 – 4:13 The Early Life. Comparative stories of the birth, infancy, and early adult life of John and Jesus – with the purpose of showing the superiority of Jesus.

4:14 – 9:50 The Galilean Ministry. This section predominately displays the miracles of Jesus and answers the fundamental issue of who is Jesus? If we are going to follow Him, we want to know Him. The section is a great picture of the true character of the Lord.

9:51 – 19:27 The Jerusalem Journey. This is often called the Perea Ministry though it is not all on the east side of Jordan. Almost 50% of this section is unique to Luke. Luke records 17 parables, 15 of which are unique to his account. Most of this section concerns the question of what it means to live as a disciple of Christ. Trust in God and love of the sinner is presented in contrast to trust in wealth and despising the outcast.

19:28 – 24:53 The Final Victory. Luke presents the crucified Jesus as the victor. He defeats the challenges of His enemies, foretells the removal of the kingdom from the hands of the Jews because of their rejection and unworthiness, and the giving of the kingdom to the Gentiles. Luke ultimately presents Him as the victor over death and the King reigning eternally in heaven.

One other key point to help us see Luke's purpose. In contrast to the other gospel accounts, Luke has key themes that would have both appealed to and challenged the Gentile world.

1. Jesus acceptance of outcasts, women, and those who were generally on the fringe of society.
2. The dangers of wealth and the foolishness of trusting in it.
3. Repentance – not just the mental decision, but the actions necessary to fulfill it.
4. Prayer. There are repeated pictures of Jesus praying, more than any other account, and three parables unique to Luke the offer instruction on how to pray.
5. Commitment. More than any other gospel, Luke describes commitment – all out, full, unreserved commitment and condemnation of anyone who "turns back" or will not count the cost.

1 Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed. (Luke 1:1-4; NRSV)

Recording the Story (1:1)

Luke begins his writing by saying that there are others who had written about Jesus. Luke was not the only writer about Jesus and this shows that there were many who thought Jesus was important and

worthy of writing about. Luke also writes these words because this matches the way ancient historians wrote. Ancient writers loved to show what they were doing had precedent. Luke is writing about the things that, "have been fulfilled among us." This gospel is about the fulfillment and accomplishment of God's plan. The gospel is about events fulfilled right there before the very eyes of the disciples and people who lived then. In Luke's book of Acts, Luke records Paul's words in which he speaks to King Agrippa and Festus about Jesus,

For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. (Acts 26:26; ESV)

People had heard about Jesus and what he did. The information about Jesus did not remain in Jerusalem. The events that took place did not happen in a corner so that no one knew about him. Quite the contrary. People are writing about Jesus and Luke decides to do the same.

Careful Investigation (1:2-3)

Luke also says that he made a careful investigation of the events that occurred. Notice the qualifications of his writing: (1) He investigated. (2) He investigated everything. (3) He investigated carefully. (4) He investigated from the very first. Luke is not some gullible person who wanted to believe in a Jesus. Luke is a professional. He is a doctor. He makes a careful investigation of those who were there at the very beginning. Luke has examined the eyewitnesses and the servant of the word of God. This writing is the fruit of Luke's investigation. Mark's gospel starts with the events of Jesus' adult life. Luke, however, went to the very beginning, and this is reflected in his writing. The gospel of Luke gives us the most information about the early life of Jesus and the birth of John the Baptist. Luke goes to the very beginning and starts with a detailed account about John the Baptist. Luke then moves on the infancy of Jesus. Luke speaks about the childhood of Jesus. The birth of John the Baptist is the beginning of the fulfillment of the things spoken by the prophets. Luke is going to show us that Jesus and the events that surround him are the fulfillment of the hope of Israel.

Luke not only investigated the accounts and went back to the beginning, but he also examined everything. Verse 3 says that Luke "investigated everything." Luke says that he put in the time and effort in his investigation of Jesus. He knew the stories and interviewed the eyewitnesses. Luke says that this was a carefully performed investigation. This work was not done haphazardly to make a publishing deadline. This is not a work with some shoddy references or fanciful stories.

Luke further states that he has constructed "an orderly account." This can mean that Luke wrote this narrative in chronological order or in thematic order. I believe that Luke's account is in chronological sequence for the most part, with only minor deviations, to keep to his particular purpose and theme. The point is that this book is not a random collection of Jesus' teachings and deeds.

We also learn in verse 3 that Luke wrote to Theophilus. His name means "loved by God," which has caused some to think that Luke did not write to a person named Theophilus but wrote to believers in Jesus. The reason we should understand Theophilus to be a person is because of the use of the title in front of his name. Luke calls him, "Most Excellent Theophilus." "Most Excellent" was a title used as a reference to Roman officials. Notice that Luke uses the same title of Felix and Festus in Acts.

"Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings. (Acts 23:26; NASB)

...we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. (Acts 24:3; NASB)

But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. (Acts 26:25; NASB)

Luke's Purpose (1:4)

In verse 4 Luke explicitly states his purpose for writing this narrative. Luke writes so that Theophilus (and by implication also all who read this narrative) would have certainty of the truth about everything that was taught about Jesus. The certainty of the truth proclaimed is guaranteed by Luke. Luke writes so that you can know the truth about Jesus. We live in a world of relativism, where there is no truth or certainty, especially about Jesus and the word of God. However, Luke made a careful investigation of the facts, interviewing the eyewitnesses and servants of the word of God. Through the orderliness of the narrative and the careful, systematic presentation, Luke hoped to reassure Theophilus and those like him about the certainty of what the apostles taught about Jesus (*Baker Exegetical Commentary*). Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise and the fulfillment of salvation, which is now available directly to all nations. You can know all you need to know about Jesus because the gospel accounts about him are accurate, based upon personal research and knowledge by trustworthy writers.

Final Thought:

I challenge you to check out Jesus for yourself. God never calls people to blind faith, but a careful investigation of the facts. We need to do the same. We need to make a careful investigation of Jesus. Too often we allow others to tell us things about Jesus. The History Channel, the Discovery Channel, and Dan Brown have given us the total amount of knowledge we have about Jesus. Most of the movies and information on television about Jesus is wrong and not based upon the scriptures. Most people do not want to do the work to know the truth about Jesus. So people just guess and assume that they know. This decision about who Jesus is too important to be lazy and careless. You need to know Jesus for yourself. You need to investigate him for yourself. Don't rely on your past knowledge. Don't rely on what the media says about Jesus. Don't assume you know all that you need to know. You must make the investigation about Jesus.

I challenge you to join us on this Jesus Journey. Make a commitment to come every Sunday and investigate Jesus together. Let Luke be your tour guide and lead you to your own conclusions.

Setting The Scene

In the days of Herod, king of Judah. We read those words so easily without considering how much they tell us about the setting of the story. Herod was an Edomite and full of wickedness. This is Herod the Great, known for his great architecture and design and for his great cruelty. It is interesting that it is not Luke's interest to point out the problems of reign of Herod. Herod killed many of his children, his friends, and his wife for fear that they were trying to take his power away from him. The Edomites came from Esau, the man forever cursed because of his profane life which also led to a nation cursed to forever become extinct because of their profanity and godlessness. "Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated" (Malachi 1:2). Now hear the words from a Jewish perspective: Herod (the Edomite), king of Judea!"

There is something dark and sinister about the words. It signifies dark, dark days in Israel's history. It reminds us of the words of Isaac when he attempted to bless Esau: "You shall serve your brother; and it shall come to pass when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck." Every Israelite had dreaded that day; but that day had come.

Adding to the darkness of these days was the fact that for 400 years God had been silent. Israel had been left on their own for the first time in their history. There have been no visions. There have been no prophets. There has been nothing given from God to Israel. It is a scene of hopelessness and despair.

Righteous & Unable to Conceive

The main character of today's story is Zechariah. He is a priest of God and he has a wife named Elizabeth who is a daughter of Aaron. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth can trace their lineage back to Aaron the high priest that we read about in the book of Exodus. Zechariah is described as a righteous and faithful Jewish servant of God. He is an ordinary priest, one of 18,000 in the nation then. Verse 6 drives home the point both Zechariah and Elizabeth righteous. They are not wicked rebels. This point must be drawn out because of the information revealed in verse 7: they are unable to have children. Elizabeth is unable to have children and now Zechariah and Elizabeth are too old to have children. To be unable to have children was considered a disgrace and shame in that society. Further, a lack of children had moral implications, that is, Elizabeth and Zechariah must be sinners and out of God's favor. Typically, barrenness was considered a curse from God. Through barrenness they were cut off to any hope of a relationship to the Messiah. Their name would die out in Israel. Oh, they had prayed and prayed for years, but now they were both old and "well-stricken" in years and they had long ago given up on that hope. The setup to the story is important: they cannot have children because Elizabeth cannot conceive and now both are too old, but they are righteous people despite this disgrace.

Names

But there is something else here that rarely gets our attention and that is their names: Zachariah and Elizabeth. Those old Hebrews followed a pattern long established by the Lord Himself. They did not name a child because they liked the sound of the name. The name had meaning; it had significance. Many years before the father and mother of Zachariah had given their boy that name because of the hope that was within them. The name means, "Jehovah Remembers." There is in the name a sound of sorrow, but also a song of hope. In the midst of darkness and despair, a boy was born and they called him Jehovah Remembers.

Now about the same time another priestly family had a child; this time a little girl. They also expressed their hope. They called her Elizabeth, the oath of God. And one day “the oath of God” met “Jehovah Remembers” and they married. Even in dark days, there was still hope.

Application: God is at work, even when it does not seem so.

Zechariah's Service in the Temple

The next picture we see is that of the temple, but more specifically, it is a scene within the Holy Place. This was great day for Zachariah. A little bit of history will help us see why today is a special day for Zechariah. **“The Mishnah states that before each of the two daily services, four sets of lots were used to determine the participants (Yoma 2:1-5). In this case the incense lot finally fell to Zechariah, and in an instant he was at the apex of personal history. The honor of offering incense was the grandest event in all his earthly existence. Many priests never had the privilege, and no priest was allowed to offer it more than once. ... Zechariah was serving God with his cohorts in the heart of the gleaming temple, in the Court of the Priests, where the sacrifice was to be made. Outside, in the Court of Israel, faithful worshipers were praying”** (*Preaching The Word: 21*). It is a great day because there was only one week in the life of a priest in which he would do the service within the Holy Place. For Zachariah, it took a lifetime before that day came. And of all things, if his time of service within that Holy Place was not exciting enough, an angel appeared – the first messenger from God for 400 years! The Bible gives us very few pictures behind those closed doors where only the priests were allowed to go. Luke reveals to us an old priest (do you see him?) who is offering incense while a gathering of the faithful are outside praying. That picture by itself is instructive. Prayers in conjunction with the offering of incense was always connected in scripture. Revelation 8:3-5 tells us that angels presented incense before the throne of God along with the prayers of the saints. It is mentioned because it was a time when God would respond.

Angel's Appearance

“Do not be afraid...your prayer has been heard...your wife will have a son...you shall call his name John.” What! Don't be afraid? Zechariah was overwhelmed with fear. This was something completely unexpected. “Your prayer has been heard.” How long do you think it had been since John and Elizabeth had stopped praying for a child? Once it became physically impossible for them to have a child, I am sure their hopes died. It seemed that God was not listening to these two righteous people. But God had listened. God does hear the prayers of the righteous. Never think God did not hear your prayer.

Application: What prayer have you stopped praying for? What prayer do you think God will not answer? Do not think that God is not listening even when we receive a “no” answer to our requests.

Application: Faithfulness to God. The prayer of the righteous seemed to go unanswered for years. Yet Zechariah and Elizabeth remained faithful.

Now notice that the angel gives Zachariah the name for the son: you shall call his name John. “John” means “the grace of God.” Now the picture is complete. The father, Zachariah, Jehovah Remembers; the mother, Elizabeth, the oath of God; the boy, John, the grace of God. God had not spoken for 400 years and now a boy is born named the grace of God, the offspring of the remembrance of God and the oath of God.

John is going to be something special. This list has special significance and is not just saying that John is going to be important. The child is going to be important to God. Look at the listing of what he will be:

(1) Many will rejoice at his birth, shows that John was going to be someone and do something that many people will be glad that he was born.

(2) He will be great before the Lord, reveals that God was going to use John. John was going to be an instrument for God.

(3) Will not drink wine or strong drink, indicating he would be consecrated for special service to the Lord.

(4) He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, that is, a prophet of God,

(5) Go in the power and spirit of Elijah, which is a very big deal. We need to read the words of Malachi to understand what this statement means. Malachi prophesied, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes" (Malachi 4:5). Elijah was predicted to come to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 3:1). Do you see what Gabriel is saying? John is the forerunner for the coming of the Lord! The hope of Israel is going to be answer within this generation! This is what the rest of the message centers on.

(6) Turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, which continues to show that John is the forerunner to the coming of the Lord. Again, back to Malachi. After saying that Elijah will come, Malachi prophesies in the next verse, "And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction" (Malachi 4:6).

John's method of restoration is to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. Malachi adds, "and the hearts of the children to their fathers." That is significant because the family is where true restoration begins. It does not begin with the king, it begins with fathers! The fathers' hearts must be tied to their children and children whose hearts are tied to their fathers. Brethren, this is the key to raising children who serve God. Many fathers, especially among Christians, make the critical mistake of simply being an authority figure to their children. They keep their children in line by enforcing their rules. But this will not endure. When the hearts of father and child are wedded together, the children want to follow the father's life and are motivated to do so not because of forceful control but because they would not dream of hurting either their earthly or heavenly father.

(7) Make ready for the Lord a prepared people. John is going to get the people ready for the Lord's coming. He will be a preacher of righteousness to get everyone's hearts prepared so that deliverance can be received at the coming of the Lord.

What we see is God tackling two prayer requests at once. John is the child they have been praying for, but he is going to prepare the way of the coming of the Messiah. This would have been a time for great praise. God is going to do what he says for his people. Think about what a great time of rejoicing this would have been. The time is now. In all of our misery and despair, God has remembered (the meaning of the name Zechariah). God has kept his oath (the meaning of the name of Elizabeth). The grace of God is appearing (meaning of the name John).

Praise God because God's hand is in motion to save his people. The Lord is coming! This is a really great day!

But Zechariah doubts. Like so many before him in similar situations, he doubts. Zechariah says, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years." This was not a faithful response. Unfortunately, Zechariah is filled with doubt which leads to some indignation from the angel. Notice Gabriel's words: "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news." Basically, who do you think you are talking to here?

The angel gives him a sign: he will not speak until the child is born. But this is not only a sign, but a punishment for his lack of faith. At a time when everyone around him will be rejoicing and singing praise, Zachariah will be silent. Zechariah was supposed to come out of the temple and offer a blessing to those who were praying in the Court of Israel after offering the incense. But he is unable to do so because he has been made mute. This would have turned into a difficult game of charades. The people understand that he saw a vision in the temple.

Application: Trust in God's promises. We will not do so perfectly (Zechariah was righteous, but has a lapse of trust here). Take God at his word. He does what he says. From our perspective, Zechariah's doubts were understandable and reasonable. But with God, anything is possible. What God promises, he delivers. We always want more evidence. God said it. It is enough.

I think this is a key message from Luke to Theophilus. God does not expect us to have blind faith. But there is a point when we have sufficient evidence.

Introducing Mary

Luke now shifts the story to another couple. The intention of the story is to draw out a dramatic contrast to the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth. So as we go through the story, be sure to make mental notes of the things that are similar to Zechariah's story and the things that are different. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel has another message to give. The angel is sent by God to a village in Galilee called Nazareth. Nazareth was a very small town of only a few thousand people at most, perhaps a lot less. Nazareth is a completely insignificant village. It is so insignificant that Luke feels compelled to explain to Theophilus where Nazareth is (note the explanation of "a town in Galilee"). Nazareth is so insignificant that when Nathanael is told the Messiah has been found and he is from Nazareth, Nathanael's response is, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). This little village where Mary lives stands in contrast to the important large city of Jerusalem where Zechariah receives his message from the angel Gabriel. There is a young woman in this village of Nazareth named Mary.

Before we can go forward, we need to break with the false images that we have of Mary. How old do you visualize Mary to be? We picture her in this blue garment, with a halo over her head, angels singing in the background, and the sun beaming on her face. We probably picture her to be in her 30s. All of these images are false. This is a normal, average girl. There is nothing extraordinary about her. She is not walking around beams of sunshine shooting from her face. Angels are not following her everywhere she goes. It is likely that Mary is a teenager and in her early 20s at the most. Remember that this is not a society where the woman stayed single until she found the right man and got married when she was 30 or 40. She is a young woman, and this stands in contrast to Elizabeth. Remember in the story from the last lesson, Elizabeth is so old she cannot bear children. Mary is so young that she is not even married yet. Mary is a virgin and she is engaged to be married. Engagements in that society were different from our society. Their engagements are more rightly called a betrothal. Most betrothals took place in that society when a woman became a teenager. A betrothal was not something that could be broken off. To break off a betrothal required a divorce or the death of the one you were marrying. The betrothal period lasted for about a year, a formal ceremony occurred, and then the couple were considered married. So picture Mary, living in a little village, who is probably a teenager, who is not married, but is engaged (or betrothed) to be married to a man named Joseph. Now notice the subtle point about Joseph. Joseph is of the house of David. That means that he could trace his lineage back to king David. Joseph has royal blood in him. Since Mary and Joseph are betrothed, any child born to Mary would be regarded as Joseph's son and part of his lineage, so long as he accepted care for the child. Luke has now set us up for the rest of the story.

The Angel's Announcement

The angel Gabriel appears to Mary and says these words, "**Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!**" That is all the angel says for the moment. This short statement leads to Mary wondering what the angel means by these words (vs. 29). An angel suddenly appears to Mary and tells her that the Lord is with her. "Okay. What does that mean?" So Mary is trying to understand what the angel has just said. Gratefully, the angel then continues with more information. "Don't be afraid." What is the first thing you do when someone begins a statement with the words, "Now, don't be afraid," or "Don't worry?" Yes, you start to become a little worried. "What are you going to tell me?" Mary is not to be afraid because she has found favor with God. Mary is going to conceive and bear a son and his name will be

Jesus. Further, this son named Jesus is going to be great and will be called Son of the Most High. Not only this, but Lord will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and his kingdom will have no end. Now, we need to understand what the angel just told Mary about this child that she is going to have.

First, just like Zechariah, Mary has no choice as to the name of the son. Zechariah was told that the son will be named John, meaning “the grace of God.” Mary is told that she is going to have a son and will name him Jesus, meaning “salvation.” Second, Jesus will be great. Remember that John was going to be “great before the Lord,” meaning that John would be important to God and would be used in God’s service. Jesus is just going to be great, not as a servant of God. He will be the greatest person ever. Third, he will be called the Son of the Most High. “The Most High” is another name for God (Genesis 14:18). John was called the prophet of the Most High (see Luke 1:76), but Jesus is the Son of the Most High. While John would be a prophet, Jesus is going to be a king. But Jesus would not be just any king. Jesus is going to be the king of Israel. Notice the rest of the description in verses 32-33: he will be given the throne of his father David, reigning over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end. Psalms 110 and 132 reveal that the Messiah would sit on the throne of David, picturing rule and authority. The angel is relating the very important prophecy given to David in 2 Samuel 7. Notice the parallel:

12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. (2 Samuel 7:12-14a; ESV)

Just as Gabriel quoted from the Malachi prophecy to reveal to Zechariah who John would be, so also Gabriel quotes from the 2 Samuel prophecy to show Mary that Jesus is the Messiah King that Israel has been looking forward to arriving. This young girl has been told a big bombshell. “Mary, you aren’t even married and you are young. But you are going to have a baby boy. But not just any baby boy. **The** baby boy! **The** Messiah! **The** King of Israel! **The** Son of the Most High! You are the favored one, Mary. Your son is going to be the hope of Israel and the fulfillment of God’s promises to his people and to the world.” What would be your reaction to these words?

Notice her words in response, found in verse 34: “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” This is a different response than Zechariah. Remember that Zechariah said, “How shall I know this?” Zechariah asks how he can know this is really going to happen. The angel points out that Zechariah is doubting (1:20). But Mary does not ask she can know this is going to happen. Mary asks how this is possible because she is a virgin. She is not doubting or lacking faith. She is simply saying that she is not married, so how can she have a child! The angel answers how she can have child in verse 35.

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy — the Son of God.” The angel answers that this conception is not going to happen by natural means. “You do not need to be married, Mary. This is going to happen supernaturally.” A miracle is going to take place. Consider that the birth of John was a miracle, for neither Zechariah or Elizabeth were able to have children. But the birth of Jesus is a greater miracle because Jesus’ birth will not happen by any human intervention. His birth will happen exclusively by the power of the Most High. To show that amazing things are happening, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that her relative Elizabeth is already six months along in her pregnancy and she is too old to have children. “Miracles are happening, Mary, and you are the next recipients of God’s miracles!”

Before we go on to the next verse, it is important to consider the words of angel. Notice that the angel does not say that the Holy Spirit is going to come upon Mary and the child will be called holy and the Son of God. There is an important “therefore” in the sentence. The virgin birth is the reason the child

will be called holy and the Son of God. This is very important to observe. The Holy Spirit is going to come upon Mary. THEREFORE, the child will be called holy — the Son of God. The virgin birth defines Jesus. The virgin birth proves Jesus is the Son of God. The virgin birth is the defining moment. There are many scholars today who say the birth of Jesus was not the miraculous virgin birth, but Jesus is still the Son of God. The angel says that such a belief is not possible. The virgin birth defines who Jesus is. The virgin birth proves that Jesus is not ordinary, but set apart from all of humanity (holy). The virgin birth proves Jesus is the Son of God. Consider the consequences otherwise. If this is not a virgin birth then Mary is a liar. She is a liar and a fornicator. Further, she is evil because she let her son believe that he was the product of a miraculous birth, letting him die on the cross believing a lie. She allows her son to die believing he is the Son of God when all along she was lying about his birth and simply was sexually immoral. You see that this simply cannot be. The virgin birth is everything to the life of Jesus and why I say that it defines Jesus. The virgin birth proves Jesus' claims about who he is: the Son of God.

Notice verse 37 and let the words sink into your hearts and minds: **"For nothing will be impossible with God."** Do we believe those words? Or do we limit God and what he can do? Do we think that there are things that are not possible for God to accomplish? Do we pray to God as hopeful wishes, thinking that God cannot do what we are asking him to do? Essentially, I am asking you what God you are worshiping. If we are truly worshiping the Creator of heaven and earth and all creation, then there is nothing that God cannot do. By definition, God has the power to accomplish anything. It is not a power problem for him. As God asked Moses, "Is the arm of the Lord shortened?" (Numbers 11:23). Is there something God cannot accomplish? We must change our thinking to believing that there is nothing that God cannot do. We see this thinking reflected in the lives of God's people through history and throughout the scriptures. God can change the outcome. God is all-powerful. Imagine if God were to come to you and tell you that a miracle was about to take place in your life. Perhaps a miracle like Mary's or something else that breaks the laws of the universe, would we believe it could happen? I think our first response would be that we don't have to worry about that because God has not done anything like that for 1900 years. But that is the thought I want you to work with because it has been a very long time since God had acted in the lives of his people in the days of Mary also! It has been more than 400 years since God spoke to the people. It had been more than 400 years since a prophet of God had walked the earth. It had been more than 500 years since a true miracle of God had occurred, with Daniel in the lion's den. Further, miracles had not regularly occurred since the days of Elijah and Elisha, nearly 800 years previously. Let us not think that miracles were regular occurrences that were readily accepted. Mary had to believe that all things were possible with God. Mary had to have the mind that God can do anything that he says.

Once Mary finds out that this is going to be a child born of the Holy Spirit and that she will be an unmarried virgin when she is pregnant, how do you think she would respond? Don't forget the impact this is going to have on Mary's life! (1) She is going to have to explain to Joseph how she is pregnant. Is Joseph going to believe her? He would have the right to divorce her for infidelity if he did not believe that she had been faithful to him but somehow was still going to have a baby. Can you imagine Mary sitting down with Joseph and trying to explain that this baby is really God's miracle? (2) Mary is going to have much explaining to do to that society. While having a child without being married not longer has much of a stigma attached to it in our society, in her time this would have been a huge disgrace. No man would marry her if she had a child out of wedlock. It would be the end of her future. (3) Mary must explain this to her parents. Can you imagine this teenage girl explaining this pregnancy to her parents? All you parents in the audience, imagine that you have set your girl up with a good man and they are engaged to be married. She tells you one day that she is pregnant. But, don't worry, she is still a virgin. Can you see Mary having to explain this to her family?

We would expect Mary to offer some resistance to this plan. We would expect her to say that this is going to be terribly inconvenient for her. She could say that this could potentially ruin her life. If Joseph does not believe her, and if her parents do not believe her, her life will forever be altered. She would be disgraced and shamed. How about the excuse that she is too young for this responsibility? Or even more, I am too young to raise the child that will be the Messiah King! Why not choose a woman who has had experience raising children and has been successful at it. Don't choose a virgin teenager! But Mary does not go down the road that Moses went, trying to find a way to get out of the responsibility placed upon her. Notice her words:

“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38; ESV)

When God asked in the days of Isaiah who will go on his behalf, Isaiah responded, “Here I am; send me.” When the angel says that you are going to have a child born of the Holy Spirit and Mary recognizes the difficulties of this task, Mary simply responds, “I am the servant of the Lord.” I am just a servant. I am happy to serve the Lord. Ask me to do anything and I will do it. Whatever you need, Lord, that is what I will do. Not whatever is convenient for me, that is what I will do. Mary will do anything to serve the Lord. This is a statement of great faith, in contrast to Zechariah. Zechariah doubts. Mary believes. Mary is ready for the task. We need to have the faith that says God can do anything and the faith that says that I want to be the one through whom God's plans are accomplished. Not only do I want God's plan to be done, but I want to be the one to do God's work and be a servant in God's plan.

Conclusion:

1. The virgin birth proves Jesus to be the Son of God. Either Mary is a liar and a fornicator or Jesus is the Son of God who must be obeyed and worshiped.
2. The virgin birth proves that nothing is impossible with God. We must believe that God has the power to do all things, otherwise we do not serve God, but an idol.
3. The virgin birth reveals the great faith of Mary who believed God's word and desired to be God's servant in the working of God's magnificent plan.

Elizabeth and Mary (1:39-45)

Mary is going to visit Elizabeth. Mary was told that her relative Elizabeth, who was too old to have a child and was physical unable to bear a child, was six months pregnant. This was proof that miracles were happening. This was proof that God was fulfilling his promises. Now was the time in history that God was going to act. God was going to intervene into human history. Now was the moment, the fullness of time, that God was going to accomplish his word. While this may see to be an insignificant event, Luke records for us the symbolic meeting of the two main characters through their mothers.

Mary enters the house and upon Elizabeth hearing the words from Mary, "Hello," the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy. Ladies, I have heard many of you talk about how strange it is to feel the baby in your womb. You will feel a foot in your gut or an elbow in your ribs. Can you imagine the baby jumping for joy in your womb? How amazing would it be that when you heard Mary say "hi," the baby just jumped? How fantastic! By the way, we have no indication that Elizabeth knew that Mary was pregnant, or that Mary was going to bear the Messiah. We see John already starting his role of pointing to the Messiah.

Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. This means that she is about to prophesy: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Mary is blessed because she was chosen by God's grace to carry the Messiah King, to be the instrument God would use to fulfill his promises. Elizabeth speaks with great humility. "Who am I that I am honored to have the mother of my Lord come to me?" Elizabeth is not full of jealousy. What is it with people who are always jealous of others? Elizabeth does not complain that she ought to give birth to the Messiah. Elizabeth exercises humility. "Isn't it great that the mother of my Lord has come and who am I that I am worthy for such a visit?"

Application: A cure for jealousy is to rejoice with others. Be happy for other people. Life is not a competition that requires comparison. Rejoice together with the good news of others.

The prophecy continues that John leaped for joy while in the womb. Don't tell God that a baby in the womb is not a person. Don't tell God that it is just tissue. It is a baby. It is alive with emotions, not just a mass. Just saying....

Elizabeth's prophecy ends stating that Mary is blessed because she believed that what the angel told her would be fulfilled. We studied this point in the last lesson, how Mary exhibited for us real faith. She is blessed for trusting God that these things would happen and did not doubt or try to get out of her calling.

The Song of Mary (1:46-56)

After Elizabeth prophesies, Mary offers up praise and thanksgiving to God. What we see is that these two women understand what is going on. They are full of faith, believing that God is acting now and using them as his instruments. In verse 46 Mary begins that her whole being praises God. She praises God with all that she is.

I really want you to observe the humility of Mary in these words of praise. There is no hint of arrogance about being selected to carry the Messiah. She does not think that because she is righteous that this is what God ought to do for her. Notice her words in verse 48. She says essentially, "Who am I? I am a nobody." She calls herself simply a servant. She does not think about how righteous she is. She realizes that she is a nobody. She is not significant and praises God that God is able to use her. Mary is

not to be worshiped. Mary is not to be glorified. Mary is not the queen of the universe. Mary is merely a righteous servant that God used.

Application: We need to see ourselves the same way as Mary does. Who are we that God has done such great things for us? We have not obtained this great salvation because are someone important. Only by God's loving grace are we able to enjoy the blessings of God. We must not look down our noses at the world. It is not an "us (Christians) versus them (unbelievers)" situation. We are "the them." We are wicked and evil. We are nobody before the great God. We will never save a soul and never show Jesus to the world if see life as an "us versus them" problem. We are no one except God's servants.

Further, we must quit thinking that we are gods. We think we can take care of our lives, run our families, solve our own problems, and do just fine. We think we do not need God and therefore refuse to depend on him. We need to practice humility. We do not get to dictate to God how our lives are going to go. We are servants, not the boss. We need to be able to say the words of Mary: God has looked upon my humble state.

Application: But we need to realize that God can use the "nobodies." Just because we are nothing does not mean that God cannot use us for his purposes. God blesses the "nobodies" and this is something that Mary utters in her praise. The holy God helps the lowly.

Loyal love is an accurate theme for Mary's song of praise. Most of Mary's praise is for God who has remembered his covenantal promises to Abraham. God is going to bless the world just as he promised Abraham. I would like for us to key into verse 50: "And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation." God loves his creation so much. More than four hundred years had passed since one of God's prophets walked the earth. More than four hundred years passed since a message from God had come to the people. That last message was a rebuke from God for their wicked ways. Yet God still shows mercy. God still shows compassion. God still keeps his covenant though it had been violated. God shows us what faithful love looks like. God will show mercy from generation to generation for those who fear him. God's divine loyalty requires him to act on behalf of the beloved. In doing so, God scatters the proud, brings down the mighty, and exalts the humble. This language has overtones that come from Psalm 2 of God establishing his king in Zion, who will shatter the enemies and rule in righteousness. God is working for the humble and the downtrodden and destroying the proud and mighty. All of these elements are found in Jesus. In Jesus we find mercy. In Jesus we find God's faithful love. In Jesus the humble are exalted. Jesus will judge and destroy the arrogant and wicked. God is acting for his people.

Birth of John (1:57-66)

Tell the story. The neighbors and relatives are all together rejoicing at the birth of Elizabeth's baby. So it is time to name the child and everyone wants to name the baby Zechariah after his father. Elizabeth says no, his name will be called John. But the relatives and neighbors persist. "None of your relatives is called by this name." Children in that culture were often named after their fathers or grandfathers. The problem of people trying to tell you what to name your baby still happens today. If you tell people what you are going to name your baby, everyone tries to change your mind. We learned to keep the name under wraps to avoid the scrutiny. In this story, the baby is born and everyone is still arguing with Elizabeth about the name of the child. So they make signs to Zechariah wanting to know what is the name of the baby. By the way, this detail reveals to us that Zechariah was not only unable to speak, but also unable to hear. Otherwise, why would it be necessary to make gestures to Zechariah to ask him something. Just ask him. But he cannot speak or hear for the last nine months (quite a long time). Please imagine not hearing or speaking for that long! So Zechariah motions for a tablet to write and writes

these words: "His name is John." I think Zechariah is emphatic about this. There is no doubt in his mind about the name. The angel said the name will be John (the grace of God) so his name will be John.

Once Zechariah made that point, he becomes able to speak. What would be the first thing you would say after being silent for nine months? Zechariah's first words were to praise God. Zechariah being able to suddenly speak causes people to wonder what this child was going to be. Three unusual events have happened: (1) The old have given birth, (2) The child has been given a strange name, and (3) The father is suddenly able to speak after nine months of silence. Clearly there is something special about this boy. Who will this John be and what is he going to do. Luke wants his readers to ask who is this John and Jesus and what are they going to do? The prophecy of Zechariah answers those questions.

Zechariah's Prophecy (1:67-80)

Notice Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit, like Elizabeth was, and begins to prophesy.

Jesus is going to redeem. Jesus is going to be the one to set the people free from slavery to sin. Further, Jesus is going to redeem in strength. Notice the phrase in verse 69, "...and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." The horn is a symbol for strength and power. We forget that today because we are not an agrarian society. But I was watching the Texas/Oklahoma football game last week. The mascot for the University of Texas is the Longhorns. The horns of that animal are enormous. It is a picture of mammoth strength, might, and power. That is the picture for Jesus. He will bring salvation in strength, might, and power. God is showing mercy and deliverance as God keeps his covenant that was made to Abraham. Notice that Mary and Zechariah's words are very similar in this regard. The gospel of Luke is going to show us Jesus in strength and power overcoming the spiritual forces of darkness and evil. Luke is setting us up with a teaser for what is ahead in the story. God is being loyal and faithful, showing love to the people and keeping his word to deliver them.

In verse 76 Zechariah's prophecy turns its words to John, the boy who has just been born. What is he going to do? John is going to be *the* (not a) prophet of the Most High. John is going to before the Lord to prepare the people. The Lord is coming and it is time to get ready. John will go and preach, teaching the people about salvation and the forgiveness of sins that's coming. This salvation comes because of the tender mercy of our God (1:78) again, a parallel to Mary's words of praise in verse 50.

When we started this series in Luke we mentioned that it was a dark time in Israel's history. There is an Edomite on the throne named Herod the Great. God seems to have abandoned his people. God has not spoken to them in over 400 years. God has not sent any prophets or messengers. The nation is in subjugation to the Roman Empire. It is a very dark time. So feel the hope of Luke's message in verses 78-79:

"The sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." The time has come. The sun is rising. The darkness is going to fade away. The Lord is coming. Things are going to change. God is speaking to his people again. God is sending Jesus to save the people from their sins. It is a time of hope after dark despair. Jesus is the bright, morning star.

Go back to verse 74-75 and notice the reason these things are taking place. These things are the fulfillment of God's words to Moses. God is keeping his promises to bring deliverance. Through Jesus we are delivered from sin. Through Jesus we are delivered from Satan. Through Jesus we are delivered from eternal separation from God (death). Jesus has done all of this for us that, **"we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days."** God is sending Jesus to the world in his loyal love. Jesus has set us free so that we can worship him and serve him. Jesus gives us light. Jesus gives us guidance. The gospel of Luke is setting up to show us the light of Jesus and teach us the path of guidance to follow.

Applications:

1. The need for humility. God blesses the humble, but opposes the proud.
2. Let the sun shine in your life. Jesus is the light of the world. God has broken into human history to save his people.
3. Serve Jesus in holiness and righteousness without fear.

Why In Bethlehem? (2:1-7)

A decree is given throughout the Roman Empire by Caesar Augustus that everyone within the empire was to be registered. The most likely reason for the census was a registration for taxes. The way the registration took place was for everyone to go to their home city to be registered. For the Jews, this is a return to their ancestral towns to be registered by the Roman government. Joseph is from Bethlehem. Bethlehem is about 80-90 miles from Nazareth. This is not a short journey for a pregnant woman in her final month of the term. The story is told to us by Luke to explain how to get Joseph and Mary, who are living in Nazareth in the region of Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in the region of Judea. Luke does not mention this, but the reason it is important for Joseph and Mary to be in Bethlehem in God's plan is because the prophet Micah declared that the Messiah would be born in the town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Luke is picturing God at work to bring about his plan for now is the appointed time.

Please notice all the details given concerning Jesus' birth in verses 6-7. What day was Jesus born? The text does not say. We do not know what day Jesus was born. It was apparently not necessary for God to reveal to us the exact day. There is a 1 out of 365 possibility (1 day out of 365 days in a year) that December 25 is the day of Jesus' birth. That is a 0.2% chance, less than one percent. The things that are done on December 25 are not done in worship to God, but out of human desire, for the scriptures are completely silent as to the day of Jesus' birth. Just as knowing the exact day of Jesus' death is irrelevant because we should worship and praise God every day for Jesus' death, so also knowing the exact day of Jesus' birth is irrelevant because we should worship and praise God every day for Jesus' birth and life.

Too often imaginations have run wild concerning the information given to us by Luke. Luke does not mention that the innkeeper is some horrible person. Nor does Luke say that this is something despicable for Jesus to be placed in a feeding trough. There is an intended point that we are not to miss. Look at the humble beginnings of the Savior, the Messiah, the King. Jesus arrives in complete obscurity. No one in Rome knew about the birth of Jesus. No one in Caesar's palace is keeping tabs on the arrival of this king. No one in Jerusalem is paying attention. In fact, no one in Bethlehem is paying attention. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus are staying in the shelter where the animals sleep. This is not "king of the universe" beginnings! The birth of Jesus draws the attention of no one in the town of Bethlehem.

Why did God do this? Why wasn't Jesus born in Rome? Why wasn't Jesus even born in Jerusalem? Why wasn't Jesus born into the Augustan family so that Jesus could rule the empire instead of Tiberius once Augustus dies? God could have just as easily had Jesus miraculously born to be to the wealthy powerful of Rome. Why wasn't Jesus born into the rich and powerful of Jerusalem so that people would perceive him to be the king of Israel? Think about those questions and we will answer these questions at the end of the lesson.

The Birth Announcement (2:8-21)

Meanwhile, there are shepherds tending their sheep at night. An angel of the Lord appears to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. Understandably, the shepherds become fearful because of this light show. But the angel says, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people; today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David." What an amazing announcement! The good news of great joy is for all people! The good news was not just for Israel. The good news was not for rich and powerful. The angel says in verse 10 that this good news of great joy is for all people. What is the good news? The good news is that today in Bethlehem was born the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord. The Savior of the world was born today. The

Messiah, the one who would deliver the nation of Israel from slavery, was born today. The Lord, the master over all people, was born today.

Further, a sign is given. The baby is wrapped in swaddling clothes and is lying in a feeding trough. This baby is not where you would expect to find him. You would not expect to find the Savior, Messiah, and Lord in Bethlehem. We would expect him to be in Rome or Jerusalem. You would not expect to find the Savior, Messiah, and Lord swaddling clothes and lying in a feeding trough. We would expect him to be wearing royal blankets, lying in a crib, in the palace of a king.

After being told the sign, having an angel of the Lord appear, and having the glory of the Lord shine around them, one more amazing event takes place. Suddenly there is an angel with a multitude of heavenly hosts are praising God. Can you imagine the sound of multitudes of spiritual beings praising God? They are praising God saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased."

Who is the announcement given to? Who was allowed to see all of this? Surprisingly, a bunch of shepherds. This announcement was not to the rich and powerful. This announcement was not to the important people of the world at the time. This announcement was not given in the city of Rome, to the Roman senate, or to Caesar Augustus. The announcement is given to simple shepherds. An important, amazing, miraculous announcement was given to these simple shepherds.

I love verse 15. Once the light show is over, the singing of praises ends, and the angels disappear, the shepherds say to each other, "Let us go over to Bethlehem." We need to go and check this out. We need to see this child. We need to know what this is all about. So the shepherds go and find Mary and Joseph, and baby Jesus lying in the feeding trough. The shepherds tell Joseph and Mary everything that had just happened and they were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. Mary soaks in this information and thinks about what all of these things mean. The shepherds leave glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

Applications

I would like to return to the questions I posed earlier in this lesson. Why wasn't Jesus born in Rome? Why wasn't Jesus even born in Jerusalem? Why wasn't Jesus born into the Augustan family so that Jesus could rule the empire instead of Tiberius once Augustus dies? God could have just as easily performed the miracle to be to the wealthy powerful of Rome. Why wasn't Jesus born into the rich and powerful of Jerusalem so that people would perceive him to be the king of Israel?

Jesus is for the average person, a man for the masses. There is no silver spoon in this king's mouth. He is not a king that comes from a privileged life. These are very humble beginnings for the king. The image is drawing a contrast between how great this child is (he is the Savior, Messiah, and Lord) but his birth is so common and ordinary. Nothing about this birth scene in Bethlehem screams, "Jesus is the Savior and King of the world!" This is God identifying with the human race. Not only is God identifying with the human race, but even identifying with the lowly and poor who are in lowly and despised circumstances. Why did God do this? God did this so that Jesus would be the king for the people. Jesus knows what you are going through and understands. Jesus cares about what you are going through. He is not a king who has no concept of what real life is like. Jesus identifies with you. He knows where you are at and knows what you are dealing with in life.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16; NRSV)

The humble king, born in humble circumstances, is looking for humble people. As we have seen in our study of Luke, the person that God is pleased with is the humble person. God is looking for humble hearts. We see Mary and Elizabeth practice humility in realizing that they were being blessed by God in the miraculous events that were happening to them. They let God do the exalting, not themselves. Humility is not an option. Those who are chosen by God practice humility before God and others. We cannot neglect to realize that humility is demanded of us. If Jesus practiced humility and we observe his humble beginnings, then it must be true for us as his disciples that we will have that same humility or we are not truly his children.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. (Colossians 3:12; NRSV)

God does not care about status. God does not pay attention to addresses, clothes, bank accounts, or resumes. The things that impress humans do not impress God. The things that matter to us simply do not matter to God. God wants us to come to him stripped away of all that pride so that his words can mold us and change us into people who will worship and serve the Lord.

Respond to who Jesus is. Jesus is the Savior of the world. The proclamation of the angels and all creation declare that Jesus is the Savior. He died for the sins of the world so that God could forgive us our sins. Has the Savior saved you yet? Have you turned to Jesus and through Jesus received the grace of God? Jesus came because all of us are destined to eternal punishment for our sins and he is the only way for us to avoid that eternal destruction. Have you been saved from your sins?

Jesus is the Messiah, the king. Are you in his kingdom? Jesus is the king and we are subject to the king. Are we submitting our lives to him? We are not with Jesus if we are living our lives according to our rules, our wisdom, and our way of thinking. We must abide by the laws of his kingdom. He has revealed his commands to us and, as the king, has called us to turn away from our selfish living and obey him.

Jesus is the Lord, the master. Are you serving him? Notice from the Luke story that everyone is worshiping and serving Jesus. He is the master. He is the Lord. We are not only called to be saved from our sins through Jesus and to abide by his laws but to serve him with all our heart. God wants your heart. God wants your love. God wants your devotion. He has done so much for us, sending Jesus to the earth in the humble beginnings that we read about in this lesson. God has demonstrated his love for us through Jesus. Will you serve him fully today?

Offering and Dedication (2:22-24)

After the birth of Jesus, Joseph, Mary and Jesus travel to Jerusalem. The law of Moses prescribed for the mother to perform a purification ceremony forty days after giving birth to a son (Leviticus 12:2-8).

6 “And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering, 7 and he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for her. Then she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, either male or female. 8 And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.” (Leviticus 12:6-8; ESV)

Mary needed to go to Jerusalem and make her offering. Notice that the command was to offer a year old lamb as a burnt offering and a turtledove for a sin offering. However, if she could not afford a lamb, she could offer two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for the burnt offering and one for the sin offering. Notice that Mary is offering two turtledoves or pigeons. In our last lesson we considered that Jesus is a king for the people who knows what you are going through. We see this point enhanced that Joseph and Mary are not rich people. They could not afford the lamb for the burnt offering and so Mary offers two birds instead, as prescribed by the law.

But the greater point in verses 22-24 is that Joseph and Mary are devout, law-abiding Jews. We are seeing that Joseph and Mary are God-fearing people. Further, Jesus had to be presented for the firstborn dedication. The firstborn was dedicated and presented to the Lord as “holy to the Lord.” No truer words were said of any infant boy presented at the temple. Jesus is truly “holy to the Lord.”

Simeon’s Prophecy (2:25-35)

Now hold this picture for a moment. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus are on their way to the temple complex in Jerusalem. Meanwhile there is a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He is a righteous and devout man. The Holy Spirit is upon him so he receives prophetic messages from God. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel to arrive. Simeon is not waiting for the hope of Israel to arrive simply because he is righteous. Rather, it was revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Simeon is in the temple complex as Joseph, Mary, and Jesus approach. Simeon, through the knowledge and revelation of the Holy Spirit, takes baby Jesus in his arms and blesses God. Verses 29-32 record his offering of praise. There are a couple of points to note from Simeon’s praise.

(1) God keeps his word. Simeon says that now he able to die in peace because God has kept his word. God said that Simeon would not die until he had seen the Messiah, the Lord’s anointed one. God keeps his word. Can you imagine what a strange life that would have been like for Simeon? Each day he woke up knowing that he was not going to die today because death could not happen until he saw the Savior of the world. Now that promise of God has been fulfilled.

(2) Jesus is a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Israel. Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 42:6 and Isaiah 49:6 that light would be brought to the Gentiles and salvation would go to the ends of the earth. Jesus is not just for Israel, but is for the world. This is a key theme in Luke-Acts: salvation is for all people, including the Gentiles. Here is one of the early markers to establish that point.

With these words, Joseph and Mary are amazed at what was said. But Simeon has even more to say, as recorded in verses 34-35. Jesus is appointed to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. This was

also prophesied by Isaiah in Isaiah 8:14-15. Jesus is going to be a divisive figure for Israel, and for the world. Many are going to stumble when it comes to who Jesus is and what we are commanded to do. Some will understand that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah who has come to save the world. Others will not. So the nation of Israel is going to be divided over Jesus. Some will see him as someone who must be opposed. Remember in our introduction to Luke's gospel, one of our questions that Luke is going to answer is how can Jesus be the Savior and Messiah when his own people rejected him and killed him. Luke already is setting a foundation to answer this charge. Simeon is predicting that some will accept and others will reject. Some are going to directly oppose Jesus. This is not to be surprise.

Lesson #1: I think this is a challenging point for us even today. I believe we struggle with the notion that people are going to oppose and reject Jesus. They are not going to just reject Jesus, but are going to vigorously and vehemently oppose Jesus. People like Richard Dawkins who describe Christians as mindless, know nothings are going to oppose Jesus. People tried to repeatedly kill Jesus for what he said and did. We are naive to think that the rejection of Jesus will not continue to be strong today. We must not be surprised by the attack against God and Christianity. It is an attack that has been ongoing ever since the virgin birth. Verse 35 reveals that this life long rejection of Jesus, culminating in his death, is going to bring Mary great pain and sorrow also. But notice that this rejection is predicted. The opposition is going to be great. Before Jesus is even two months old prophecy already predicts that rejection is coming. The rejection of Jesus was not an accident. The rejection of Jesus was foreknown by God, against premillennial doctrine to the contrary. This rejection response to Jesus is natural and expected because Jesus was not going to be a teacher who makes people comfortable. Jesus was going to reveal the thoughts of the heart. Jesus' ministry would show where people's hearts really are before God. Jesus' life and teachings expose our unbelief. People will get upset at the word of God.

The Prophetess Anna (2:36-38)

Luke also introduces another righteous and devout person in Israel, a prophetess named Anna. She is completely focused on serving God. She is worshiping with fasting and praying day and night in the temple. She is giving thanks to God and speaking about Jesus to those who were also waiting for the consolation of Israel to arrive.

Lesson #2: I just want to quickly point out that Anna is 84 years old. She did not take a vacation from serving or worshiping God in her old age. I want us to see that she is just as devoted as she was in her earlier years. She is praying and fasting and she is always at the temple. But there she is in the temple complex teaching people about Jesus. Even when we are older, we are not exempt for serving and teaching. We cannot allow the excuse of age to cause us to stop serving. Sure, you can do things that you used to do. But that does not mean you should stop. Keep serving and keep teaching. Paul instructed Timothy to command older Christians to teach younger Christians. Your seasoned faith inspires and prompts faith in others.

Jesus Knows Who He Is (2:39-52)

Luke now moves the story forward 12 years. Jesus is twelve years old and the family is traveling to Jerusalem from Nazareth for the Passover feast, as the Jews did every year. After the feast was completed, the family along with many others from Nazareth form a caravan of people traveling back to Nazareth. But Mary and Joseph did not know that Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. They thought he was with the other kids and in another group in the pack. So they begin searching within this large group of people for Jesus, but he is not there. Can you imagine the intense fear of not finding your child and wonder where he is at? I have had that feeling a couple of times when I thought one of my children was one place and did not know that she had gone with someone else and that person was watching my girl.

I would imagine that Joseph and Mary returned to Jerusalem in a panic, asking people if they had seen their twelve year old boy named Jesus. Verse 46 tells us that after three days Joseph and Mary find Jesus.

But the story takes an interesting turn. Jesus was not at a playground somewhere, doing childish things. Rather, Jesus is in the temple complex. He is sitting with the teachers, listening to them and asking questions.

Lesson #3: We need to expect more from our children. We act like they cannot comprehend spiritual things because they are just kids. I want you to consider that Jesus is not even a teenager yet. In our terminology, Jesus would be in 6th or 7th grade. Jesus is not playing with toys but sitting among the teachers, asking spiritual questions and learning. We need to teach our children and challenge our children spiritually from a very early age. Schools begin teaching our children from ages 4-5. By five years old our schools expect our children to be able to sit still for one hour, to be quiet, to listen, do homework, and learn. It is not too much to ask your children to do the same in bible class and in our assemblies. My point is simply this: we can expect our children to perform spiritually to the same level of what society expects for them to perform at that age in the school system. Think about what they are required to do in terms of quietness, listening, projects, homework, and learning and challenge your children to do the same things for God. Further, don't say, "Well, Jesus was God and that is why he is doing that." Do not ruin the picture of Jesus by thinking that. If we can simply take the life of Jesus and excuse it as different than ourselves because he was God, then Jesus cannot relate to us, was not tested like us, and is not an example we can follow. He must be fully human or he is not the king for all people, a man for the common person.

Not only is Jesus listening to the teachers and asking questions, but notice that Jesus has spiritual understanding. The teachers are amazed at his understanding and his answers. Jesus' parents have taught him the scriptures and spiritual understanding well. Jesus, at twelve years old, is amazing the teachers in the temple.

Mary and Joseph finally find Jesus in the temple complex. I think their response is exactly the response we would have as parents. "What are you doing! Why weren't you with us? You gave us a heart attack! We were looking everywhere for you!" But look at Jesus' answer:

"Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" What a fascinating response! Why were you looking all over Jerusalem for me? Where else would I be but in my Father's house. We see Jesus with the awareness of who he is, even at this young age. But he is submissive to his parents, increasing in wisdom, in years, and in favor with God and people.

Lesson #4: Our final lesson comes from the first recorded words from Jesus' life. The words of Jesus at twelve years old. Where else would I be? Don't you know that I must be in my Father's house? It should be obvious that the most important thing in life is God. It should be evident that what matters to us in this world is teaching, learning, and worshiping God.

Could these things be said of us? If people were to wonder where we were or what we were doing, would they think it would be spiritual things? Do they see that worshiping God is the most important thing? Do they see that serving others for the sake of Jesus is the model of our life? Do they see that studying the word is our life guide? Do we communicate to others that God is the most important thing? Do our children see that in our lives? Do we make our children learn that God is the most important? Or is school more important than God? Is sleep more important than God? Is some sport, organization, or recreation more important than God? I hope that people in the world look at us and think that we are always at church, always praying, always helping others, always studying God's word, always serving the Lord.

Concluding Reminders:

1. Jesus brings opposition and resistance. Expect the same as you model your life after Jesus.
2. Even the elderly can serve and teach like Anna the prophetess. Your seasoned faith is valuable in teaching the lost and other Christians.
3. Raise your children with the goal of becoming like we see Jesus in verse 46: desiring God, listening to and learning from the scriptures.
4. Life must have one priority: God.

A Picture of Repentance Luke 3:1-14

In chapter 3, Luke begins by looking at the ministry of John. John was prophesied to be the forerunner to the Messiah. We are going to learn about how John is preparing the way for the arrival of Jesus, the Savior of the world. John is going to teach us what repentance looks like. Repentance is a difficult concept to quantify. What does repentance look like? Luke is going to show us in this third chapter what God means when he calls us to repentance.

The first two verses of chapter 3 set the historical world context for the ministry of John and Jesus. Luke records that it is the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. This means that it is 28-29 A.D. This is when the word of the Lord came to John. This signifies John's prophetic calling to preach to the people.

Proclaiming Repentance (3:3-6)

John was in the region around the Jordan River preaching a message of repentance. Repentance is not a word commonly used today. The word literally means a change of mind, but the scriptures indicate a broader meaning than just a change of mind. In the Old Testament repentance was a call for a person to turn away from sin and turn to God (1 Kings 8:47; Ezekiel 18:21,30). This is what John is doing. He is preaching to the people, telling them to turn from their sins and turn to God because the Lord is coming. John's preaching is in line with Isaiah's prophecy.

John is the voice crying in the desert. John is not in Jerusalem preaching this message to the masses. John is preaching his message in the wilderness and the crowds are coming to him. John's job is to tell people that the Lord is coming and they need to be ready for his coming. The creation is to roll out the red carpet and be ready for his arrival. This is the idea behind the words of the prophecy to make his paths straight, fill every valley, bring the mountains low, and level the rough places. The imagery is commonly used for the clearing of the way for the entry of a king. If we were going to have an important person arriving at our house, we would make sure everything is prepared and as perfect as possible for that arrival. John is calling out that the most important person ever, the Lord, is coming. When the Lord is coming, you better make sure that you are ready for his arrival.

We have many obstacles that interfere with the Lord coming to us. We have lives full of clutter that keep us from finding the salvation of God. We are busy with things that are morally neutral, interfering with our relationship with God. There is nothing wrong with work, but we let it interfere with our worship and service to God. There is nothing wrong with our children's extracurricular activities and sports. But we let those things interfere with our worship and service to God. There is nothing wrong with having our hobbies and recreation. But we let those things get in way of our service and worship to God. We just busy ourselves with all of these worldly things and we think we that we are okay with God because we are not doing wicked things. But the problem is that we have obstacles, not evil obstacles, but time consuming obstacles that prevent the devotion to God that is necessary for salvation. John is going to explain further what it looks like for us to remove these life obstacles that occupy our time and keep us from worshipping as we ought. But I want for each of us to think about what are the obstacles that we have in our lives. What are the things that are stopping me from having a deeper devotion for God? What am I doing in my life that is preventing me from having a deep relationship with God and with his disciples?

The Content of John's Message (3:7-9)

What we read in verses 7-9 is John's very sensitive message to the nation (sarcasm). Notice the sharp words of John. "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" John just called

the crowds of Jews that were coming to see him a family of venomous snakes. This is especially interesting because snakes are commonly used as an image for being an enemy of God (Isaiah 59:5; Jeremiah 46:22; Isaiah 14:29). Now what is staggering about John's declaration is that he does not say these words to the pagan Gentiles who are practicing idolatry. John says this about the Jews, the people who thought they were God's saved people. The Matthew account tells us that John says these words when he sees the religious leaders and teachers of Judaism coming to him. John says this to the religious people. John's point is that the Lord is coming and wrath is coming because the people have not been doing what the Lord requires. The people are in a rotten condition. They need to turn their lives around, away from sin and toward God, before it is too late.

In verse 8 John gives the people instructions for what they need to do. They need to bear fruits in keeping with repentance. They needed to show repentance. The people needed to show that they had turned their lives away from sin and to God. We learn that it is not enough to say that we need to make changes or to say that we love God. Our lives must reflect that decision. Our lives must show the change of mind that has turned toward God. This is what John is doing by proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The people are coming to John and they are realizing that God's wrath is firmly against them. They are being baptized to mark this commitment of a life turned to God, asking God for deliverance from the coming wrath. We will talk more about baptism in a future lesson. But it is important to see that baptism is being used as a symbolic picture of washing sins away and marking a life that has turned from sin to God.

Verse 8 continues John's preaching. The people were not to think that repentance was unnecessary. They were not to think that their lineage or genealogy was enough. The Jews thought that since they were children of Abraham that this was enough to save them from God's wrath. John says that this thinking was false. Don't think you can rely on what your parents did. Maybe your parents had you dedicated at a church or christened or baptized as a baby. But that is not relevant. Just because your parents were religious or you grew up in a church does not mean that you are saved. Look at verse 9. The ax is laid at the root of the tree. When the ax is at the tree, the tree is about to be cut down. It was going to be God's wrath against them because their life did not reveal repentance. The point is that here are all these religious people who had religious parents who performed religious acts. Yet none of those things mattered! Why? Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Even though they were religious it did not matter because they were not living a life that showed they had turned to God. They were relying on what their parents had done rather than on faith. They were depending upon their genealogy rather than on a changed life for God. When we learn how merciful and gracious God has been toward us, we must live a life of thankfulness to God for what Jesus has done.

What Repentance Looks Like (3:10-14)

The crowds ask John what they need to do in verse 10. Since the wrath of God is coming and we are not saved based upon our religiousness or genealogy, what needs to be done? John has already answered this question. The people need to live lives that reflect they have turned to God. The crowd wants to know what that looks like. I am sure that these religious, Jewish crowds who kept the feasts and offered their sacrifices already thought they were living lives in devotion to God. John says they are not. So the natural question is what does it look like to have lives that are turned to God? Verses 11-14 reveal the answer and the answer may surprise us.

John tells the crowd that whoever has two shirts is to share with him who has none and to do the same with food. The answer John gives is not social separation or to offer more sacrifices. John's answer is to look out and care for the needs of others. Jesus is going to have the same message. Now let's not

be too narrow with what John is saying. He is not saying that because I gave someone my undershirt that now God is going to save me. I hope that if we saw someone who did not own a shirt that we would all run to our closets and give our extras. In a similar way, we have been sending our extras to the suffering Christians in Zimbabwe. The ideal that John is teaching involves an unselfish approach to life that is compassionate for others and gives a spare possession to meet a basic need. A life turned to God is an unselfish life.

John calls into question our perspective of our possessions. Do we view everything as ours or as everything is God's? God has blessed us and we must share our blessings with others. God has given us the things we have and a life turned to God understands that. The repentant heart does good to others because God's love has been so great toward us. One of the fruits of genuine repentance, of a life that has turned to God, is sharing what we have joyfully.

The tax collectors also ask what they need to do. John answers that they were to only collect the money that they were authorized to collect. In the first century tax collectors had the deserved reputation of taxing higher amounts than legislated to line their own pockets. In verse 14 the soldiers also ask what they need to do. John responds to not take by force and by false accusations. John says that a life turned to God does not cheat others. Repentant people do not take from other people. Don't take from others. Notice that John is also calling for honesty in this teaching. A life that has turned to God reflects honesty. We will be honest in our business practices and not take. We will be honest in our dealings with people, not trying to take every last dime out of someone. We won't be bully. We will not force people to do things for us or to do things our way. It is shame to see how often Christians act like bullies, especially in their marriages. Further, notice also that the life turned to God shows contentment. Be happy with the things you have. Don't take. Just enjoy what God has given you.

God is not glorified by our begrudging submission to rules, but in our joy in submitting to him. What would you think if you asked my about how my marriage was to April and I gave this response: "Well, I gave my word so I am in. Look, to be honest with you, I think my wife is horrible and she sucks the life out of me. But I made a promise. I made a promise to stay faithful and I am a man of my word. So for the rest of my long, long life I am going to stay with her." Is anyone saying that they want that for them? Is this the submission that we think God wants? Yet this is all too often how we approach God. "I guess I have to go to church services." "I guess I have to do the right thing and help." This is not what God is asking for and does not reveal fruits in keeping with repentance. We are not showing a life changed for God.

So we need to examine our lives. Are the valleys being filled and are the mountains being lowered? Are we clearing out the obstacles in our lives to prepare for the Lord's return? Repenting is the removing of those obstacles and turning our lives to God. Then we need to live lives that reflect that we have turned our lives to God. We need to be honest. We need to be selfless. We need to give and serve. Our lives must show God's love. Are we doing things that show we have lives that are turned away from sin and to God?

Luke 3:15-17

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

One of the topics that initiates great interest is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to be baptized by the Holy Spirit? Is it a supernatural experience? What does it look like? These are things we will consider in our lesson today because John is going to preach the coming of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The text for the lesson is from Luke 3:15-17.

Messianic Expectations (3:15)

John is preaching in the desert and crowds are coming to him. John is preaching a message that the wrath of God is coming. The ax is laid at the root of the tree and the nation is about to endure God's judgment. The people needed to repent (turn away from sin and turn their lives to God). The people needed to live their lives in a way that showed they had turned away from sin and turned to God. This is the picture of producing fruit consistent with repentance (3:8). People are being baptized by John, a baptism that signified their commitment to God to turn to God and away from sin. In baptism the people are asking God to wash away their sins, defilements, and mistakes.

John is generating excitement among the crowds. The nation of Israel had a heightened expectation of the arrival of the Messiah at this time. About 190 years earlier, the Jews had regained some independence from the Grecian powers. The Jews gained control of their temple, cleansed it, and dedicated it to the Lord. But about 85 years earlier the Romans exerted control over Judea and over the nation of Israel. The Jews were looking for a Messiah who was going to overthrow the Romans and initiate the age to come in Jerusalem. It has been more than four hundred years since there has been a prophet of God. It has been more than four hundred years since the people of Israel had received a message from God. Now here is a person who is preaching the words of God, declaring judgment upon the people, and salvation to those who live a life turned to God. The people are questioning whether John is the Christ. They think that John is their deliverer king. John is going to respond to their thoughts and questions concerning who he is.

John's Role With Jesus (3:16)

John begins by saying that he is baptizing them with water. I am baptizing you to prepare you for the one who is coming. I am not baptizing you to follow me. I am baptizing you to get your hearts ready for the coming of the Lord. John says that this is not about him, but about the one to come. The one coming is mightier than John. The one to come is much more powerful than John. John is not the Christ. But when the Christ does come, he will be far more powerful and mightier than John.

Notice how much greater the Christ will be over John. John says concerning the Christ, "The strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." We need to let the weight of this statement sink into our hearts. John says that he is not worthy to even take off the Christ's sandals. To understand this image, we need to learn a little about the background. In those days, one of the duties of a slave was to untie the sandals of the master's feet. In Judaism, the act of untying one's sandal was such a degrading act that a Hebrew slave was not to undertake it. John says that the Christ is so great that he is not worthy to perform the degrading act of untie his sandal straps. Don't forget that Jesus would later say of John that John was the greatest born of woman. John said that he is so inferior to the Christ that he is not worthy to perform the most menial, degrading task for his master.

What does this say about us in our pride, in our esteem, and in our arrogance? We need to get in our minds and hearts this very same attitude. If Jesus said John was the greatest person born of a woman, and John said that he is so nothing and so inferior that he was not worthy to perform a

demeaning task for the master, then what should be our attitude about ourselves? We need to stop thinking of ourselves as someone great, as someone important, or as someone valuable to the world, and see ourselves only as servants of Jesus.

Baptism of Fire (3:16)

John is preaching to the crowds and he is explaining the greater work that the Christ will accomplish. How did the Jews who heard John's words understand the baptism of fire? Was the baptism of fire a good thing or a bad thing? Let us look to the scriptures first:

"For behold, the LORD will come in fire and His chariots like the whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For the LORD will execute judgment by fire and by His sword on all flesh, and those slain by the LORD will be many" (Isaiah 66:15-16; NASU).

"As one gathers silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into a furnace, to blow the fire on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in my anger and in my wrath, and I will put you in and melt you. I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of my wrath, and you shall be melted in the midst of it. As silver is melted in a furnace, so you shall be melted in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the LORD; I have poured out my wrath upon you" (Ezekiel 22:20-22; ESV).

It is shocking to see scholars argue the baptism of fire was a good thing. I read one scholar describe it as a picture of God's grace. But scriptures always speak of fire as being bad. Even being refined by fire, while ultimately having a good outcome, describes a painful process in the meantime (see James 1 and his description of trials).

John the Baptist is telling the Pharisees and Sadducees that they are the ones who are going to receive God's judgment of fire. Notice Luke 3:9, "Even now the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees! Therefore every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." (HCSB). Also notice Luke 3:17 continues the picture of wrath and judgment. "His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (ESV).

Further, the baptism of fire is not speaking about the tongues of fire that appeared upon the apostles' heads. The Acts 2 event is not called a baptism of fire. In our context John is speaking to the Jewish leaders and the crowds, telling them that they will experience the baptism of fire because they have not repented. The ax was laid at the tree, Israel, and the tree would be chopped with the coming of the Messiah. The wrath of God was coming in judgment against Israel.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit (3:16)

Since the baptism of fire is a description of judgment and wrath (see Malachi 4), what then is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Before we answer this question, we need to again notice that these are two events John is speaking about. Can we say that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a bad thing, like the baptism of fire? Not at all. The explanation of John's imagery is found in Luke 3:17.

"His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:17; ESV).

Notice that the coming Messiah is going to gather His wheat into the barn. This describes a blessing event tied together with a judgment event. The Messiah is going to gather the people who are His, but destroy those who are not. John the Baptist is not preaching something new. The prophets spoke of two events that would take place when the Messiah came. One event would be good, but the other would be judgment.

"For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it

will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 4:1-3; NASB). Notice how Malachi prophesied about a day of fire where the evil were set ablaze. But also observe that good tidings are also prophesied as those who fear His name will tread down the wicked.

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. 29 Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. 30 And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 32 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls. 1 For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem..." (Joel 2:28-3:1; ESV). Again, the good is tied together with the bad. The Spirit will be poured out and the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem will be restored. However, at the same time, the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood. These are images of judgment. In effect, Joel prophesies that it will be "lights out" for the nation of Israel.

Therefore, there is nothing unusual about John the Baptist preaching that the good will come with bad when the Messiah arrives. Israel is going to receive a baptism, either a baptism of blessings or a baptism of judgment. The righteous would receive the blessings of God while the wicked would receive judgment and destruction. John is preaching to the crowds to be saved from the wrath to come.

The Sorting (3:17)

Verse 17 amplifies what verse 16 is saying. There is a sorting that is going to take place. A division of the people is going to occur. The Christ is going to come and he is going to sort out who are his true people who are living lives that bear the fruit of repentance and those who are not, just like a farmer winnowing the wheat from the chaff. The chaff are put into the fire. When Jesus spoke of unquenchable fire, he always related it to eternal punishment of hell (see Mark 9:43). Thus, the baptism of fire is the same as the unquenchable fire, that is, the eternal punishment of hell. John is calling for the people to be prepared for the coming of the Christ before it is too late. God's wrath is coming upon the disobedient. God's wrath is coming on those who pretend to be Christians. The people needed to live in such a way that showed a life turned away from sin and turned to God. These will be the ones gathered into his barn.

Conclusion

You must choose what you will be immersed in. You can either be immersed into the grace and blessings of God (the baptism of the Holy Spirit) or you can be immersed in God's wrath and judgment (the baptism of fire). Be saved from the coming wrath and receive the blessings of God's grace today. Follow the teachings we have learned in Luke 3. Make the commitment today to turn away from sin and turn to God. Mark that commitment by being immersed in water, asking God to wash away your sins. God will do it if you will come to him.

In an interesting literary move by Luke, rather than continuing to follow the life of John in sequence, Luke opts to bring John's life to a close in this gospel with a short statement about John's imprisonment.

"So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison." (Luke 3:18-20)

The Luke account gives us a very short picture of what took place. I would like for us to go to the Mark account to get a better picture of what happened between John and Herod. Mark 6:17-29 records a fuller account of the scene that occurred. After reading this text, it is important to fill in some background information. This marital situation is recorded in history by the Jewish historian, Josephus. Herod's first wife was the daughter of Aretas, an Arabian king of the Nabateans, whose land bordered Perea. Herod divorced this woman to marry Herodias, the wife of Philip. Herodias had been married to Herod's half brother, Philip. When Herod divorced his wife and married Herodias, it created an explosive political situation that eventually led to war. There are three points that I would like for us to consider.

There Are Marriages That Are Not Lawful

The first point that immediately jumps off the page are John's words, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Many want to discount this story because Herod married his half-brother's ex-wife. But this point is really not relevant to the point. The key point we learn is that some marriages are not approved by God. This is a shocking revelation to many. There are marriages that are not lawful. We currently live in a time where marriage and divorce and remarriage are simply accepted facts of life. It is assumed by most that divorce and remarriage is fine and that all divorces and all remarriages are approved by God. This is simply not the case. So we need to know which marriages are lawful and which marriages are not. Jesus taught clearly which marriages were approved or not approved by God.

The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"⁴ And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,'⁵ and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"?⁶ So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:3-6; NKJV)

Can a person get a divorce for any reason? Jesus is very clear that the answer is no. The two become one flesh and the two people joined in marriage are not to separate. Of course, the Jewish leaders had a problem with this, just as many today have a problem with this teaching. The Jewish leaders of the day were teaching something fairly similar to what is taught on marriage today. They taught that it was okay to divorce as long as you used legal proceedings. Go through the court system and sign the paperwork. Then it is okay to divorce. Jesus responds against this teaching.

They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?"⁸ He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." (Matthew 19:7-9; NKJV)

Paperwork is not what Moses meant, even though that is how the Jews were understanding Moses' law. So Jesus clarifies what God's teaching is. No divorce — do not separate what God has joined. The only cause where divorce is allowed is in the case of sexual immorality. This means that if your spouse

cheats on you, then God gives you the right to divorce and marry again. If that is not the case, then if a person divorces and marries another person, adultery is being committed.

Jesus taught the same thing that John taught. Not all marriages are approved by God. Not all marriages are according to God's law. We do not have the right to divorce and remarry whoever we want as many times as we want. In fact, it is probably safe to say that most divorces and remarriages today are not approved by God, assuming that most divorces are not for the cause of sexual immorality.

We learn something very important at this junction. Human laws do not supercede God's law. Just because it was lawful under Roman law for Herod to divorce his wife and marry Herodias and it was lawful under Roman law for Herodias to divorce Philip and marry Herod did not mean that God approved this marriage. The marriage was sinful and that is what John is preaching to Herod. "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." In the same way, just because our society allows divorce and remarriage for any cause does not mean that our marriages are lawful or approved by God. We cannot bend God's law to match our human laws. Just because the law of the land says something is okay does not mean that it is okay with God.

I would like for you to observe something in the text. Carefully read Mark 6:18 again. Herodias had divorced Philip and was now married to Herod. But, looking at Mark 6:18 carefully, who does John say Herodias is the wife of? Notice that John does not say that Herodias is Herod's wife. John says that Herodias is still Philip's wife. This divorce and this remarriage were not approved by God. Since this divorce and remarriage was not lawful or approved by God, Herodias was still bound to Philip even though Roman law had allowed a civil divorce and remarriage. Isn't it interesting that Luke records this scene so closely to the message of repentance that John was preaching in the desert? I believe this is part of the message of repentance that John is calling for the people to perform. It is time to turn from sin and turn to God. It is time to live lives that show a life turned to God, not a life turned to selfishness or sinfulness.

What Is Our Response To A Message We Do Not Like or Agree With?

One of the important points we learn from this text that can be easily overlooked is the response of Herod and Herodias to John's teaching. Rather than listen thoughtfully to John, Herod ignores John's teaching and Herodias wants to kill the messenger. These are the same typical responses that we have as humans to teachings we do not like or do not agree with.

First, we can choose not to listen. We let what is being taught go through one ear and out the other. We choose not to pay attention. We nod our head and thank the messenger, but we are really not listening. We are not really letting the words of God sink into our hearts. We read that Herod liked John, but he did not let John's message change him. He refused to let John's teaching reach his heart. Because we have some sort of doctrine, philosophy, or belief pattern, we refuse to listen to something that might show us that our philosophy or belief pattern is wrong. It is sad that our response to teaching can so quickly be a knee jerk reaction of "that's not right" or "I don't agree" without even giving the message a chance. We just say we don't agree because accepting what we are being taught would mean that we are wrong, and we know that can never happen! Rather than be convicted by the word, we put up walls and refuse to even listen.

The other response is one of shooting the messenger, like Herodias did in a literal sense, but we do in a figurative sense. Don't like the message, get the preacher fired. Don't like the message, make his life miserable. Someone comes up to us to correct us and show us where we are in error, destroy the messenger. Don't listen. Simply justify the way you are living and torment the person who tried to save your soul. The shepherds come to you concerned about how you are living your life. Instead of

accepting our toes being stepped on, we shoot the messenger. The messenger is wrong and we stubbornly refuse to change. This happens far too often.

We are going to lose our souls when we have this kind of response to the message. **That is why the Holy Spirit says, "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested me in the wilderness." (Hebrews 3:7-8; NLT)** Why did Israel fall away from the Lord? They fell away because when God sent his messengers to correct the people and teach the people the will of God, they refused to listen. They would torment and kill the prophets. They would not listen to the words the prophets had from God. Friends, listen and do not harden your hearts. God teaches us difficult things. From controlling anger and ending pride to God's divorce and remarriage laws, God teaches us challenging things for us to do in our lives. Listen and do not be stubborn in heart. Always be openhearted and openminded to the word of God and to those who teach us, correct us, and encourage us.

We Must Have The Courage To Teach The Whole Message of God, Even When the Response Will Be Utterly Negative

Finally, we learn from John to preach God's word even when you know it is not going to go well for us. John is imprisoned and ultimately loses his life because he preached to Herod that he was in an unlawful marriage. It is easy for us to want to avoid the difficult scriptures and challenging teachings. Just teach the things we can all agree on and everything will be fine. God has not called us to fair weather messengers. We cannot simply teach the things that will keep us out of trouble or will avoid controversy. The word of God must continue to be taught about marriage, divorce, and remarriage even if we do not like it. We must keep preaching to the world that immorality is sin and is not acceptable to God.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; ESV)

We cannot change this message and we cannot avoid this message. All we can do is preach this message in love, with the understanding that we were the same as them. We all need the blood of Jesus. We all need the grace of God.

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11; ESV)

We are constrained and we are compelled by God's law. We need to know what we are doing wrong so that we can make sure that we continue to stand in God's grace. We do not want to walk away from God. So we need to know what he says and make the changes in our lives to receive his grace. John could not change the message and could not keep quiet in the face of sin. We cannot either and be disciples of Jesus. If we truly care about people and we truly care about their eternal souls, then we must have the courage to teach the whole message of God, even if people disagree, walk out, sever friendships, or even suffer persecution. Go back to Luke 3:19 and notice that John not only preached against Herod for his unlawful marriage, but also "for all the evil things that Herod had done." It sounds like John hounded Herod about his sinful life.

You are coming to a place where the word of God is taught, and I will not apologize for that. It is out of love that we teach the word of God to you. We want you to receive grace and continue to be a child of God. If we were about the numbers, we would preach the easy things that we can all agree on and play movies instead of reading God's word. But we are all about getting God's word out. We beg you to listen and learn from God's word and turn to him. Do not stubbornly hold on to your beliefs and your

way of life that stands contrary to the word of God. Let us not be shameful like Herod and Herodias who rejected the truth because it was inconvenient. Hear God's word, let the words sink in, and turn to Jesus.

Jesus' Ministry Begins
Luke 3:21-38

Having spent the majority of chapter 3 talking about the message of John, Luke is ready to record the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus now becomes the focal point of the gospel and the introductory material and preparation has been given. It is now time to learn about Jesus and take the journey with him. There are a couple of observations we need to make that reveal to us the supremacy of what is being recorded concerning the baptism of Jesus. First, all the gospels record this event, each in their own unique way, but refer to it one way or another. Second, any time there is the voice of God from heaven speaking we need to pay careful attention. God's voice booming from the heavens is not a common occurrence. When it does happen, we are being told to pay attention. God has something important to say and he will not say it through his messengers or prophets. God will say it himself.

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:21–22; ESV)

Let's begin our study with what Jesus does. Jesus comes to John for baptism. This brings up a number of questions. John was proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3). The scriptures are very clear that Jesus did not need to repent from sins nor needed forgiveness of sins because he is the perfect lamb of God. So what is going on? Even John asks Jesus why he is coming to him for baptism in the Matthew account. Jesus responds that it was time to fulfill all righteousness. This also does not give us much to go on, but I think it is enough for us to grasp what is happening.

(1) Jesus is validating the work and the message of John. John is preaching the message of God. John is a prophet of God. Jesus' work is not going to stand in conflict to John's message. Jesus is validating the work and message of John.

(2) Jesus gives us examples to follow. One cannot help but consider that Jesus is providing an example for us to follow. If baptism is not important or necessary, then what is Jesus doing? If baptism is completely irrelevant and has no function in the Christian life, then why is John preaching baptism and why is Jesus submitting to baptism? Baptism is an act that everyone must participate in to be in Christ and receive God's grace (Romans 6:3-4).

(3) But the most important reason for this event is to declare Jesus to be the Son of God. It is not to make Jesus the Son of God. This was the declaration and confirmation that Jesus is the Son of God. Let us first examine the declaration of Jesus as Son of God. The gospel of John explains how Jesus' baptism was the declaration to Israel of who Jesus was.

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." 32 And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29–34; ESV)

Notice that John says he was baptizing with water so that Jesus would be revealed to Israel (1:31). Once this event happens, John was able to testify to Israel that he saw the Spirit descend from heaven

like a dove and it remained on him. According to verse 33 this was the sign that God gave to John to know with certainty that this man was no ordinary man, but was the Son of God.

Not only does the baptism of Jesus have a declarative aspect to the nation of Israel, but it also has a confirming facet. The words of God concerning Jesus confirm that Jesus is the Son of God. The voice from heaven says, "This is my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

The first part of this statement comes from a prophecy found in Psalm 2. Psalm 2 is a coronation psalm where the Messiah was anointed and crowned as king.

7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (Psalm 2:7-9; ESV)

Jesus is identified as the messianic Son of God. The psalmist declares the sovereignty of the Son even in the midst of opposition and rejection. The quotation from Psalm 2 shows that Jesus is the prophesied king who is enthroned by God to rule the nations.

The second part of God's words after the baptism of Jesus come from Isaiah 42:1-4.

1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; 3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. (Isaiah 42:1-4; ESV)

The parallel is found in verse 1. This is my beloved Son, in whom my soul delights (or, "in whom I am well-pleased). We should not quickly pass over those words. What a powerful declaration that this one, Jesus, is the one person that God could say that he takes delight! Jesus is the only person who would live a life that God would be well-pleased. He could not be pleased with us because we have all sinned and all fallen short of God's glory. None of us are righteous, not even one. We are enemies of God and are separated from God. Only Jesus is the one whom God could say, "With you I am well-pleased."

Isaiah 42 prophesies the coming of the servant. The servant is described as a ruling prophet. But he does not come in tyranny or in an abuse of power. Look at the words that he will not lift his voice, he will not break a bruised reed, or quench the faintly burning wick. The servant is coming to heal the people. The servant is coming to save the people. He will bring justice (notice the repetition of this thought, verses 1,3,4). Jesus is that prophesied servant.

The baptism event is the declaration and confirmation that Jesus is the Messiah, the king, the prophet, and the savior. Jesus' ministry will now begin, declaring to Israel who Jesus is, confirmed by God that Jesus is who he says he is. Jesus comes fully approved by the Father. He has authority as the promised Son over the blessings of salvation. Jesus is the one and only way to the Father.

The Genealogy of Jesus

Luke 3:23-38 records the genealogy of Jesus. We should immediately ask, "Why does Luke put the genealogy here?" Why now? Why not earlier in the gospel narrative? What is Luke trying to show us with the genealogy such that Luke puts the genealogy in the gospel at this point? Why put the genealogy between the baptism of Jesus and the temptations of Jesus?

There are two important connections in Jesus' genealogy. The connection to David establishes Jesus' rights as a royal heir. Jesus has the right to be king of Israel. The connection to Abraham links Jesus to the promise given to Abraham. God promised Abraham that in his descendants all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Jesus has the right to be the savior of the world because he is a descendant of Abraham. But Luke makes a connection that Matthew does not make. Luke takes the

genealogy of Jesus all the way back to Adam. This is an important connection to the theme of the gospel. Jesus represents all humanity. The genealogy, therefore, lays out that Jesus is able to be the fulfillment of the hope of Israel and the fulfillment of hope for the whole world. Jesus has the right to serve God as the mediator for all humanity. The promised king of Israel is also the head of the human race. Gentiles have been brought into the promises of God along with the Jews. Consider that everyone from Abraham and earlier is not a Jew or Hebrew, but a Gentile. Jesus is the hope for all the world, regardless of nationality.

The point is not only that Jesus represents all humanity, but he relates and acts for all humanity. This is the necessary connection to Luke 4. Luke is going to move on in the narrative of Jesus by describing the temptations of Jesus. Now I believe we can see the appropriate flow of Luke. The baptism of Jesus declares Jesus to be the Son of God. The Father confirms that Jesus is qualified to be the Son of God and the fulfillment of prophecy. Further, the genealogy reveals that Jesus is qualified to be the Messiah, the hope of Israel, and the savior of the world. The temptations of Jesus show that he is the savior for all the people, a man for the masses. He can relate not only to Israel, but to every human being because he was tempted in all points but did not sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Finally, we learn the approximate age of Jesus when he begins his ministry. Luke says he was about 30 years old. We noted that Jesus was born around 6-4 BC. Therefore the ministry of Jesus began around 25-28 AD. In Luke 3:1 we pointed out that the ministry of John begins around 29 AD. So the math does work, since Luke does not say that Jesus was exactly 30 years old, but about 30 years old. This allows a give and take of a couple years.

Verse 23 also contains a subtle but important statement that Joseph was the supposed father of Jesus. As we have studied thus far in Luke, Joseph was not the father of Jesus by blood, because Jesus was born by the power of the Holy Spirit. But Joseph took the legal right as father of Jesus in his marriage to Mary. But Luke reveals that many simply supposed that Jesus was the son of Joseph by natural means. But Luke has taught us that this is not the case.

Conclusion:

1. Baptism is necessary and important. Otherwise, why is John preaching baptism and why is Jesus baptized?
2. Jesus was not baptized because he needed forgiveness, but as a validation of John's ministry and, more importantly, to declare to Israel that he is the Son of God.
3. God confirms that Jesus is the Son of God with the words, "You are beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."
4. The genealogy also confirms that Jesus has the legal right to be the messiah king and savior of Israel and the world.

Battling Satan
Luke 4:1-13

The importance of the temptation scene in Luke 4 cannot be overstated. This is a showdown between Jesus and Satan. This is a moment where everything is at stake. If Jesus fails, everything is lost and Satan succeeds. If Jesus fails, the hope for humanity is lost because we need a Savior to redeem us from our sins. At this moment, Satan is bringing a full force assault on Jesus because this is his best way to win his battle against God. Revelation 12 reveals the picture of Satan, as a dragon, ready to destroy Jesus in any way possible.

Verses 1-2

As Luke begins to record the narrative, his emphasis is on the human nature of Jesus. Jesus is placed in a time of distress and weakness. Jesus is not facing Satan during good times. Jesus is not sitting on a couch in an air conditioned home, watching television after a Thanksgiving day feast. Jesus is in the desert. Jesus is fasting. Jesus is very hungry. Satan is throwing his temptations at Jesus in a time of vulnerability. We are expected to read this event with concern because the conditions are not ideal. This is not like when Satan came to Adam and Eve in the garden where everything was paradise and perfection. Jesus is in the desert. Jesus has been fasting and now Jesus is quite hungry.

Further, Luke gives us a detail that we miss from the Matthew account. Jesus has not been fasting for 40 days and now Satan comes to Jesus at the end of those 40 days. Rather, the Greek is in the present participle which means that Jesus was tempted for the entire 40 days. Most of the major translations reflect this participle properly, like the NKJV does. **"...and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil" (NKJV).** These three recorded temptations either are the culmination of the temptations or are representative of the temptations Jesus faced. Forty days of Satan throwing all that he has at Jesus. Forty days of Satan causing Jesus problems, not leaving him alone, tempting him over and over again. How we can feel the weight of a temptation press us hour after hour, day after day! Jesus endured that also. Now Satan continues his attack on Jesus.

Temptation #1 (vs. 3-4)

It is important to understand what Satan is doing in these temptations statements. I believe I have misunderstood the devil's words. Satan is not saying to Jesus, "I don't really believe that you are Jesus. Prove it to me. Turn this stone into bread." The devil knows who Jesus is. In fact, that is the reason why the devil is attacking Jesus with these temptations. The temptation attack is not for Jesus to prove himself. The attack is far deeper and far more intense than that.

The first temptation questions God's provision and care. The temptation looks like this: "If you are the Son of God, then God does not want you to starve in the desert. You are too important for that to happen. So meet your basic needs." The devil is not doubting that Jesus is the Son of God. Satan is actually affirming Jesus as the Son of God and using that truth as the point of attack. "You have been fasting for forty days and you are in the desert with nothing to eat. You are the Son of God. That must mean that God does not want you to starve in the desert. So meet your own needs by your own power."

The temptation is for Jesus to act independently of God. Satan presents a challenge against God's provisions. The temptation is to no longer depend upon God to take care of him while in the desert. "You need to look out for yourself and not trust in God." The devil is making the suggestion that God was abandoning Jesus and, therefore, Jesus needed to look out for himself.

Same temptation for us. We are tempted strongly in the very same way. Satan is always coming in during our difficult times, encouraging us to rely upon ourselves, trust in ourselves, and accept that God

is not providing for us this time. We fall into this temptation all the time. We lose our job and Satan tells us that we have to take matters into our own hands because God is not with us. You are suffering and God is not going to take care of you. We hear this thinking come out in our language. We ask, "Where is God?" when things are difficult. The money is tight, so give up on God. We think that we cannot trust God to provide. This is the temptation that Satan is giving to us and if we are honest, I think we will admit that we repeatedly fail when presented with this temptation. We are independent Americans who rely upon no one but ourselves. God is the first one that gets the boot when times are challenging. Satan says the same words to us that he said to Jesus. "God doesn't want you to be unhappy." "God does not want you to be in poverty." "God wants you to have things in life." "God does not want me to be lacking anything." So we go after things in life on our own, thinking that we can keep God as our companion while we pursue the pleasures and riches of this world.

Jesus' response is very important. Please notice that Jesus' response is not an affirmation of Satan's teaching. Jesus does not agree that the Christian life is about being happy, having things, being wealthy, and serving God. Carefully examine Jesus' answer. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3. The context of this quotation is Moses calling on the people of Israel to depend on God's faithfulness in delivering his promises. Consider the meaning of the quotation.

Life is defined by doing God's will and depending on God, not in personal satisfaction or living independently. To put the quotation into common words for today: Life is not about the physical, but the spiritual. We fall into the same trap as the people of Israel in the desert. They repeatedly did not trust God to provide for them, complaining about their food and water conditions on the way to the promised land. To us, this physical life is everything. This is the temptation Satan presents. "You are going to die out here in the desert." Jesus responds that the word of God is life. Spiritual life is what matters most. This is the response to the attack of Satan. When things are falling apart in this life, realize that our life does not consist of this world. Life is in God, not in the things of this world. Jesus is telling Satan that his hunger is not important. It doesn't matter. The word of God matters. I need to look to God in my difficulties and trust him, realizing that our troubles are a small thing to what we are looking forward to with God. Trust God to provide, understanding that these provisions are not what life is all about. These provisions are God's temporal blessings to assist our worship of God until we can be with him. Satisfying our physical yearnings is not as important as trusting and obeying God.

Temptation #2 (vs. 5-8)

The second temptation is Satan's attempt to get Jesus to abandon his loyalty to God. Satan is offering Jesus a shortcut. Jesus can leave behind the rejection and the suffering that is going to come and be the promised king. Satan again is not questioning if Jesus is really the Son of God. Satan is saying, "If you are the Son of God, then you should not have to suffer to receive the kingdom in power. Take a shortcut and avoid the pain. Worship me and I will give you the kingdoms and their glory." How powerful this temptation must have been! Jesus could avoid the suffering and become king. "Have an easier, more comfortable life. Abandon your loyalty to God and worship Satan."

I know this temptation is powerful because we succumb to this temptation for far less. We worship our idols just so that we can sleep in, have a little more money, have a better job, have more things, or be more comfortable. Jesus was offered the kingdoms of the world and their glory. We are offered sitting on the couch tonight, or an extra few hundred dollars.

Before we evaluate Jesus' answer, consider what Satan says about what he can offer. Satan says that the authority of the nations has been given to him and that he can give that authority to Jesus. Many think that Satan is lying when he says this. However, if Satan is lying, then this is not a temptation. You can tempt me to leave God for ten million dollars if I know that you do not have ten million dollars to

give. If Satan cannot fulfill this offer, then Jesus would not have been tempted and would simply respond, "You do not have that power." But this is a powerful temptation because Satan could give Jesus these things, offering him the chance to have glory and avoid the cross. Satan is called the ruler of this world (John 12:31). We need to get it into our minds that Satan has power in this world and that is why things are the way they are. This is why the world is evil. This is why there is suffering. This is why life is difficult. Satan has authority here. Satan is roaming about in this world.

Jesus' response is instructive again. We only can worship God. We have a mentality that we must avoid suffering at all costs. We think that things ought to be easy for us in this life. When things do not go the way we want or think they should go, we are confused. But this shows that we are worshiping someone or something other than God. God alone is worthy of our allegiance. Avoiding suffering cannot be our idol. Our work cannot be our idol. We cannot worship our children, by making sure they are always happy and giving them everything they want. We want to bypass the difficulties of life that come from serving God. But seeking the things of this world shows that we are idolaters. We worship our health, thinking it is the most important thing. We think we need to stay alive as long as possible because it is so important to us. We think and are often taught that as long as God is number one, we can have all of these other idols in our life. We might say, "What about our family?" We do not make our family number two, as if it were another idol! We love our families because that is part of what it means for God to be number one. God is number one and that is it. Everything we do in life is because it is our worship to God (Romans 12:1). God alone is worthy of our allegiance. We must have no other gods or idols. So if I am called to suffer in this life, so be it and I will worship God in my suffering. If I am called to poverty, so be it and I will worship God in my poverty. If I am called to lose my family, so be it and I will worship God in my loss. If I must go the difficult road, I will still serve my Lord and serve none other. This is the mentality we need to fight Satan's temptation to worship our idols to receive material, physical benefits now.

Temptation #3 (vs. 9-13)

The third attack of Satan is similar to the previous attacks. Satan is not questioning if Jesus is the Son of God. Rather, Satan is challenging Jesus because he is the Son of God. But Satan also uses the scriptures to raise the intensity of this temptation. Satan says, "If God protects his own and you are the Son of God, then you can jump and not worry." The psalm promises the protection of God's own.

I think it is important to observe that even the devil can use scriptures to deceive people. The scriptures can be misapplied. The scriptures can be twisted. The scriptures can be used to justify doing something that is actually sinful. This is really important to see. The scriptures can be used to bring people into sin rather than to bring people to holiness. Satan is clearly still at work with this deception when we see all of the different denominations. Everyone is using the scriptures differently, failing to realize that not all of us can be right.

Back to the thought of Luke, the temptation of Satan is to put God to the test. Test God on your terms to do what you want him to do. This temptation is also just as strongly used today. We want to cause God to do what we want to do. We want to use prayer like a stick on a pinata, thinking that God must do what we want because we prayed for it. The problem is that this attitude looks pious and holy. This idea is strongly pushed in many churches today. Many are preaching to pray to God and it will happen. Pray for a parking spot and God will give it. We are expecting God to do something for us because we are Christians, as if he was a genie in the lamp. Satan is suggesting that Jesus can show his true and full dependence on God by jumping and letting the angels protect him. We think God should prevent bad things from happening to us. We often put God to the test on our physical health, thinking that God has to heal us from our various infirmities. If God does not do what we want, we lose our faith

and trust in God. We pray amiss for so many things. James 4:3 warns us of this problem that we do not receive what we are asking for because we are praying with the wrong attitude and motive. **When we are praying for anything that is not for God's glory and God's purpose, then we are praying wrongly.** We often think James is saying that we need to ask for the right things and not the wrong things. This is true, but there is more to it. The motive of our prayer is also under examination. Are we praying for something for ourselves because this is what we want or are we praying for God's glory to be fulfilled in whatever circumstance we are petitioning? Observe the difference: do we pray for brother or sister so and so who has cancer because we just want the person to live forever, or because we cannot stand to lose them (our selfish need)? Or will we pray for God's will to be accomplished? Will we pray that we want healing because he or she is useful in God's kingdom? Will we pray for healing because we want this to be a tool for God to be glorified? We can pray for things wrongly simply in our motivation. We need to ask why we are asking God to do something before we pray for God to act. Are we testing God? Are we asking selfishly? Or are we praying for God's glory and goodness to spread in what we are asking?

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 in response to the temptation. The context of that quotation is concerning the Israelites, given to them as a reminder to not test the Lord as they had done at Massah in Exodus 17. Do not test God. Trust God.

The paragraph concludes with the notification that Satan was not done. He was going to come back and try again at another opportune time. This reminds us that Satan is looking for our weak moments to strike against us. Satan does not wait for when we are strong, but in our moments and times of weakness. Then he brings the force of his temptations against us. Satan is never done. He will never give up against us. We must continue to fight his lies.

Applications:

1. Satan is able to rationalize, justify, and misuse the scriptures to tempt us to sin. Know the scriptures to be able to defeat him.
2. The temptations are questions of our loyalty. Will we be loyal to God, even if we do not have material wealth and physical health? Will we be loyal to God even if we must suffer? Will we be loyal to God and put away our idols? Will we be loyal and not test God to conform to our will?
3. Temptations reveal our lack of trust in God. Do I trust God to get me through? Do I seek after God above all else, knowing that this is true living? Or do I think that God is not going to provide for me, so I must take shortcuts, rely upon myself, and do what I want to get what I need? Satan is testing our loyalty, revealing where we are lacking trust. Learning from your weak points, the places where we fall to temptation, and grow going forward. Understand that this weakness reveals the need to develop trust in God in that area.

What Jesus Preached Luke 4:14-30

Luke is going to spend some time revealing to us the teachings and activities of Jesus. Jesus is teaching in the synagogues, a place where local Jews convened for the reading of the scriptures and teaching (something similar to church services today). Jesus has been going to each synagogue in various cities throughout the Galilee region. This would be like Jesus going to various churches throughout south Florida teaching the scriptures. Verses 14-15 reveal that the people are responding positively to Jesus' message, praising and glorifying him and his teaching. Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth, where he grew up. He enters the synagogue and Luke is going to tell us about what happens to Jesus in the synagogue of his hometown. Will the response be favorable like the rest of the places Jesus taught in Galilee or not?

Jesus' Sermon

To appreciate what is happening, it is useful to understand the synagogue service order. We have ancient Jewish sources like the Mishnah that tells us how synagogue services were run in ancient times. The congregation would recite Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which was called the *Shema*. The scripture begins, **"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."** After reciting the *Shema*, they would share in prayer and singing songs. After the prayer and songs there was a reading from the Law of Moses and then a reading from the Prophets. Once the readings were completed, there would be an exposition of the text (what we would call a sermon today) that usually would tie the readings together. The service closed with a benediction, the pronouncing of a blessing on the people.

Now we can understand what is going on here in Luke 4. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah is given to Jesus. We are in the part of the synagogue service where the prophets were read. Jesus opens the scroll of Isaiah and turns to the place that is marked in our current scriptures as Isaiah 61:1-2. This passage in Isaiah was predicting the coming of the Messiah, who would bring salvation to the nation. The figure of Isaiah 61 brings a message of God's deliverance to the exiles. The Spirit of the Lord being upon this Messianic figure means that he would be God's designated servant with a special task given by God. The Messiah was not going to be a self-proclaimed messiah, but one designated by God (as we saw in the baptism scene of Luke 3).

Notice the emphasis of Isaiah's prophecy is on the proclamation. Three times Isaiah says that the Messiah is going to be proclaiming. He will proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, and the year of the Lord's favor. This reading by Jesus helps us understanding the thinking of the day. Israel had already been set free from Babylonian captivity. However, Isaiah's prophecy had not yet been fulfilled because Isaiah was not merely speaking of a physical release from a world power. Rather, Isaiah is picturing the coming of the Messiah who will liberate the people from their sins. The prophecy pictures a messianic figure who will restore God's blessings to the people ("proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"). The people are oppressed by sin and wandering in the darkness of sin. But the Messiah will come and bring light, blessings, and favor. Notice that God's blessings and favor will not be proclaimed to the rich and powerful. The message is to the poor and the oppressed. God's saving grace is coming to all people.

This picture is summarized in the statement, "The year of the Lord's favor." This phrase has an allusion to the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-55). Under the Law of Moses the year of Jubilee occurred every fiftieth year and was when the debts were canceled and slaves were freed. All of this is a metaphor for the salvation of God that would come where the debt of sin would be canceled and the people

would be set free from the slavery of sin. Isaiah is picturing a time when salvation, liberation from sin, and illumination of the people would arrive. This is what the people thought when this scripture in Isaiah was read in synagogue.

Before we go forward, we need to also ponder why Jesus did not finish the rest of Isaiah's sentence. Verse 2 of Isaiah 61 reads, "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God." We have previously noticed that Luke has recorded that when the Messiah comes the blessings of God will come. But the judgments of God will also come. This is what Isaiah also prophesies. The Messiah will come, bringing blessings to the people, but judgment will also arrive with him. There are a number of reasons conjectured by scholars as to why Jesus does not finish the quotation in Isaiah. I think that those who knew the scriptures (and those in the synagogue knew the scriptures well) would finish the rest of the sentence in their minds.

After reading the scripture, Jesus takes his seat. All eyes are upon him, waiting for his exposition of the text. Here is how Jesus' sermon started: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The time that the faithful people of God have been waiting for has arrived. The time is now! What a statement! God's salvation has now arrived! The blessings of God are being poured out on his people today!

The People's Conflict and Jesus' Response

This sermon leads the people to a conflict. The people are amazed at his gracious words, but they are troubled because they know who Jesus is. Jesus is in Nazareth. They know his parents and they watched Jesus grow up. Jesus has now placed upon himself the Isaiah 61 scripture, declaring himself to be the prophesied servant that Isaiah spoke about. The people are thinking, "Wait a minute! We know who you are. You can't be the one! You are not messianic material!" Mark's account records the words of the people. "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:3). Essentially, "You cannot be the one! Your family is right here!" Luke shortens this thought process with the concise, "Is not this Joseph's son?" So Jesus preached a good sermon, but they did not accept the point Jesus made. This leads Jesus to respond sharply to the synagogue.

Jesus declares that they are not going to believe him and they will demand the signs done in another city be done in Nazareth. The people want Jesus to show his stuff. It is important to consider that the people are not innocently and honestly asking for a sign for Jesus to prove his claim. Jesus did many things that proved he is the Son of God. The Mark account perhaps gives us an additional insight that despite all the works, teachings, and signs Jesus will perform, the people will not accept him, always asking for another sign. One of the problems that repeatedly occurs in Jesus' life is that people do not see the signs to prove that Jesus must be obeyed and followed, but they want the blessing of the sign. Rather than be amazed at who Jesus is and follow him completely, the people are amazed at the miracle and selfishly want more miracles to occur to meet their physical needs of health, hunger, or thirst. I believe this is the problem that Jesus is addressing with the people of Nazareth.

But Jesus does not leave his criticism with this point. Jesus digs the point deeper. In verse 24 Jesus notes that a prophet is not accepted in his hometown. Please note that Jesus is calling himself a prophet of God (previously calling himself the Messianic servant of God fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy). Jesus then uses two historical events to illustrate what is going to happen with him.

First, Jesus uses the days of the prophet Elijah. The time of Elijah was a wicked and evil time, a real low point in Israel's history. It was a time of covenant unfaithfulness. Jesus points out that there were many widows in Israel at that time. But Elijah did not go to those widows. Elijah was not sent to one widow in Israel, but was sent to a widow in Sidon. The point is that God blessed a Gentile widow. God

did not send Elijah to Israel's widows because of the nation's unfaithfulness. In the same way, the prophet Elisha also did God's work during a time of Israel's unfaithfulness. There were many lepers in Israel at that time, but God did not send Elisha to any of the lepers in Israel. Instead, God sent Elisha to Naaman who was a Syrian. Again, another Gentile received God's blessing. The implications of this teaching are enormous.

1. Jesus compares the current time when he is preaching with one of the least spiritual periods in Israel's history. This is a major blast against the people. The spirituality of the people was at an historical low back in the days of Elijah and Elisha. The first century was just as poor spiritually.

2. Gentiles, who were hated by the Jews and were considered not worthy of God and his blessings, would receive God's blessings during that time rather than the Jews.

3. The rejection in his hometown of Nazareth represents what will happen to Jesus as he preaches throughout Israel.

4. The rest of the Isaiah text is true. Jesus is proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor, but he is also proclaiming the day of vengeance of our God. Jesus is not speaking good news now. He is preaching judgment upon them for rejecting Jesus. Those who reject Jesus are going to suffer punishment.

The story concludes with the response of the synagogue of Nazareth. They do not take this message to heart. They do not reconsider their ways. They respond like Herod and Herodias. They try to kill Jesus. They rise up on the synagogue and drive Jesus out of town. They were going to throw him off the cliff, but Jesus passed through their midst. Here is a sign for the people of Nazareth. They are trying to kill Jesus, but Jesus passes through them unharmed. Jesus' time has not yet come. No one will take his life. Jesus will give up his life voluntarily at the proper time.

Lessons:

1. We must realize that all of us are verse 18. We are spiritually poor, spiritually blind, and spiritually oppressed. Jesus had to say those words to the church at Laodicea.

I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. (Revelation 3:15–18; ESV)

If we do not recognize our condition, we will fail to understand what God is offering to us. We think that we are prospering and have no need for anything. Unfortunately we do not realize our spiritual condition. We fail to see that we are enslaved to sin. We miss that we are walking in darkness and are not having the life and the blessings that God wants us to have. This is what makes Jesus' words ironic. It is usually the physically poor and physical oppressed and distressed that understand their need for a Savior. They are the ones who understand they are spiritually needy.

2. Jesus teaches in the synagogue to help the people understand that they are spiritually needy. He uses the illustrations of Elijah and Elisha to show them that they have a spiritual deficit and need Jesus. Jesus attacks us where we do not expect him to attack us. We want to think that we are spiritually fine. Jesus says that we are not. We do not understand what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah King. We do not understand that we need Jesus to have the good life, to break the enslavement of sins, and to have eternal life given to us.

3. Jesus preaches jubilee, the year of the Lord's favor. Jesus has come and he has broken the power of sin and death by living a perfect, holy life, dying for our sins, and raising from the dead. The good news is proclaimed to us that we can be free from Satan. We can be free from the broken life.

Jesus has come offering to heal our lives and change us. He wants to open our eyes so that we can see how much he has done for us and how much we need him.

4. Jesus' mission is our mission. We must proclaim this good news to everyone. The debt of sin has been released and salvation has been offered. We are called upon to accept this truth and put our trust in Jesus. Then we are to turn and proclaim this news to everyone else. In a time of darkness and distress there is Jesus who brings life and light to our lives. He brings purpose and meaning to our lives. He brings promises and blessings. Jesus is calling for people to not reject his message of hope, freedom, and a new life. Jesus is what is missing in your life. Jesus is what you need in your life. We need to tell others that they need Jesus just like us.

“You Are The Son of God!”

Luke 4:31-44

Luke’s emphasis so far in his gospel is to depict who Jesus is. In our last lesson we noticed Jesus describing himself as the Messiah servant, the prophet of God sent to bring good news and set the people free from sins. The synagogue in Jesus’ hometown rejects Jesus as the Messiah, representing how this would be the overall response of Israel. Luke is also going to introduce to us the power and authority of Jesus.

Teaching With Authority (4:31-37)

The first point Luke introduces to us is that Jesus’ teaching possessed authority. This fact astonished those in the synagogue who were listening to him. From what we know about Judaism at that time, the rabbis would quote other rabbis. Many rabbis are recorded in the Talmud as saying that they never taught anything that they had not heard from other teachers. Jesus did not teach like that. Jesus handled the scriptures. He taught the scriptures, not what everyone else said about the scriptures. I suggest to you that this was a contributing reason for the Pharisees and scribes inability to properly perceive the scriptures. The religious leaders in Jesus’ day knew the scriptures but were dull in their understanding. Rather than teaching the scriptures, the rabbis apparently (and is still true today) taught what the other rabbis taught. This indicates that they were not thinking through the scriptures for themselves, but were simply accepting the teachings that had been handed down to them. But doing this is not a faith built upon God and his word. It is a faith built upon the understanding of some person which is not godly, scriptural faith.

This problem happens all too often unfortunately. Preachers and teachers simply believe and accept what other preachers, teachers, and commentators said or wrote. The congregation simply believes and accepts what the preachers and teachers teach. No one is studying the Bible for themselves but is relying exclusively on past teachings and writings. Preachers rely on books, the congregation relies on the preacher, and no one studies the scriptures for themselves. Now, do not get me wrong, the teachings and writings of other authors is very valuable and extremely important. I am reading more than ten commentaries and listening to a few preachers for our Romans study. But I cannot simply accept what a commentary says simply because it is in a book. I cannot simply accept what a preacher says merely because he says it and he has a good reputation. I need to think and reason through the scriptures for myself. I need to consider that the preacher’s conclusion could be wrong. The commentary may not be right, even if written by our brethren. Learn the scriptures and teach the scriptures, not what humans have written. Second Timothy 4:2 commands us to preach the word, not other teachers, scholars, or writers. Teachings and commentaries have a very important place, but can never replace our own personal study and thoughtful reflection of the scriptures. Jesus amazes the synagogue by teaching in a way that the rabbis in that did not teach. Jesus did not simply preach about God. He is God and taught with such authority. Mark’s account tells us that Jesus “taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). Think about this: when Jesus preached, he not only preached the word of God, but his words were the words of God. Jesus had teaching authority.

Authority Over Unclean Demons

In the synagogue there is a man who has the spirit of an unclean demon. Before we can go further, it is important for us to understand demons, or unclean spirits. Demon possession is a strange phenomenon, even in the scriptures. We do not read about demon possession in the Old Testament. But we turn the pages to the New Testament and we suddenly come across the problem of demon

possession, particularly in the nation of Israel, though not exclusive to it. From what we read in the scriptures we learn that an unclean spirit would overtake the body of the individual the spirit lived in. The unclean spirit would cause the person would inhabit the person against his or her will and would cause the person to do things against his or her will. We read about a possessed person who cut him, another threw himself in the fire, and other disturbing things that people who are in control of themselves would not do.

One of the popular questions asked today is: does this kind of demon possession still occur? The scriptures give a very clear answer.

On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. On that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more; and also I will remove from the land the prophets and the unclean spirit. (Zechariah 13:1-2; NRSV)

Zechariah is prophesying about what will happen at the time of the coming of the Messiah. He is going to open a fountain for cleansing from sin and impurity. Not only this, but when the Messiah there will no longer be a need for prophets because God is going to speak through the Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). Also, there will no longer be unclean spirits in the land. This is an important connection to make for people today. When Christ came bringing the forgiveness of sins, then the unclean spirits would be removed. To answer the question if there is still demon possession today is that there cannot be the demon possession that we see in the gospels because Christ would remove them. This is what we see in the gospel accounts, as Jesus and his apostles go through the land casting out these unclean spirits.

Many respond to this answer by asking what about all the strange things we see going on in the world today, sometimes classified as paranormal. I think there are two reasonable answers to this. First, there are many people who like to make things up to grab attention and get on television. We cannot deny that people will do some very strange things to try to make things appear paranormal. For example, the crop circles supposedly made by aliens turned out to be some really bored people who maintained those crop circles for the attention. It was not paranormal. It was abnormal, in that there are strange people who will do strange things for attention. But it was not paranormal. Second, I do not deny that people can voluntarily subject themselves to Satan and his power. People can choose to serve Satan and go into the world of the occult. I think you can find some terribly frightening things by giving yourself over to that world and life. But that is not what we are reading about here in the gospels. What we are reading are people who are involuntarily overtaken by an unclean spirit that causes them to do things and know things that the person does not want to do or does not know of himself. Even in this text we see this, as the unclean spirit thrown the person down in the midst of the synagogue (Luke 4:35). Zechariah prophesies that people will not be overtaken by Satan any longer. But you can certainly go seek after Satan and let him rule your life. With these things set aside, we can return to the story.

The man who has the spirit of an unclean demon makes an amazing declaration. First, the unclean spirit recognizes the power of Jesus. Jesus is going to remove the unclean spirits from the land and the unclean spirit recognizes that this time is coming. The spirit seems to want to know if this is going to happen right now. The spirit knows its end is coming, but is Jesus is going to take care of these unclean spirits now? The answer is yes, because we see Jesus casting out these unclean spirits. Jesus is exercising his authority over unclean spirits, and of greater importance, over Satan.

We also must notice the confession of the unclean spirit. The spirit calls Jesus, "The Holy One of God." Before all the people in the synagogue the unclean spirit declares that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is the Holy One of God. Jesus is the one uniquely set apart for service to God. Jesus' response is fairly interesting. Jesus tells the unclean spirit to be quiet. He does not tell the synagogue to listen to the unclean spirit or base his ministry on the spirit's confession. I think it is reasonable to consider that the

confession of an unclean spirit is not a ringing endorsement. A confession from an unclean spirit might lead to the opposite conclusion, that Jesus is from Satan, rather than the realization that Jesus truly is the Holy One of God. The story concludes with the demon being cast out and the people being amazed at the power of the word of Jesus. No one else could do what Jesus had just accomplished.

Be sure to notice how Jesus exercises his authority over the unclean spirit. It is by his words. Jesus has the authority and the power that he can just say the words. This is another reason why unclean spirits cannot exist today. No human has the power that Jesus had to cast out these spirits. Jesus gave this power to his apostles, but this was the end of that demonstration of God's power as they cast out all the unclean spirits. No one today has the authority like Jesus to say words to cast out spirits, which is how Jesus always cast out these spirits. Jesus simply says, "Be silent and come out of him!" Jesus can rebuke demons and they must obey because his words were powerful. Who is this person who can cast out demons just by his word? Jesus must have the power of God.

Healing Authority (4:38-44)

The third power Luke reveals to us is Jesus' power of severe sickness. Peter's mother-in-law has a high fever. This was a very dangerous sickness in ancient times. They did not have Tylenol to be able to bring the fever down. The point is that this is not a minor illness or insignificant problem. Observe how Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law. He heals by his powerful word. This is the third time that we have seen the power in the words of Jesus. He spoke as a person who has the authority of God. He spoke and cast out an unclean spirit. Jesus now speaks and heals this woman of a high fever. Luke emphasizes that this was not a natural healing. Please notice that she does not continue to lay in bed and starts feeling better the next day. She immediately gets up and starts serving. Jesus has complete authority over diseases and disabilities of the human body.

These are not isolated incidents. Notice in verses 40-41 that people begin streaming to Jesus for healing. Luke is careful to point out that Jesus "laid his hands on every one of them and healed them." We are reading about the compassion of Jesus. Jesus is not turning away those who come to him. He loves people and he wants to heal them. Jesus wants to make them well. Jesus desires that the masses come to him.

Notice the confession of these unclean spirits. They are saying, "You are the Son of God!" But Jesus with his powerful word rebuked the unclean spirits and healed the people of this affliction. Allow me to make an observation at this point. It is not enough to simply confess that Jesus is the Son of God or the Holy One of God and think that salvation has been given to you by God. Here are demons confessing who Jesus is, but there is not forgiveness or salvation offered to them because they confess him. James makes the very same point in his letter.

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! (James 2:19; ESV)

You can believe in God, but this is inconsequential because even the demons believe. You can even believe Jesus is the Son of God and openly confess that Jesus is the Holy One of God. But guess what! Even the demons did the same thing. Confession alone is not the means of receiving God's grace. We have a religious world that says a person just needs to say a prayer and believe to be saved. But this is not found in the scriptures. Today we have seen evidence that confession alone is not the answer to salvation. Confession is a great starting point, but you have not brought your faith to completion is asking God for forgiveness through immersion in water.

Final Thoughts:

1. Preach the word. Study the word. Human teachings assist, but must not replace, our examination and learning from the scriptures. Further, God has given to the church to preach the word. We are not an entertainment facility. Dedication and focus must be on the word of God.
2. Jesus exhibits his great authority through his powerful word. Jesus' powerful word is available to us through the scriptures that we hold in our hands.

1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. 3 He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (Hebrews 1:1-4; NRSV)

3. Submitting to Jesus' authority. Even the demons understood that Jesus was the Son of God. But it is not enough for us to be here today in worship. It is not enough to believe in Jesus. We must go beyond what the demons proclaimed and give our lives to Jesus. We must submit to his authority.

Following Jesus
Luke 5:1-11

In our last lesson we saw the unclean spirits knowing the power of Jesus and declaring Jesus to be the Son of God and the Holy One of God. Luke brings us forward in his narrative to show us what our response should be to the knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. Luke is showing us how we are to respond to the fact that Jesus is the Holy One of God. This leads us into Luke 5.

Setting The Scene (Luke 5:1-3)

Luke tells us of a time when the people are pressing in against Jesus. This is an exciting moment because they are closing in on Jesus to hear God's word. The people want to hear Jesus and the implication is that they cannot hear very well because of the size of the crowd. So the crowd is pressing in on to Jesus to listen to him teach God's word. Luke has already caused us to grasp a subtle point that he is communicating in this gospel to Theophilus and all other readers. Since Jesus is the Son of God, we need to listen to what he has to say. We do not come together for entertainment and comfort. We come together to praise God and to hear God's word. We cannot come for any other reason. We are not coming for stories, dramas, or movies. We must have the desire like the crowd to press in to hear God's word. God's word is that important. Give us nothing else but the word of God. There can be no substitution.

The pressing of the crowd gets to the point where Jesus is at the edge of the lake. Jesus gets into one of the boats on the shore, the boat of a fisherman named Simon who had just completed a night of fishing. The fishermen are there cleaning their nets, probably also listening to Jesus at least to find out why the crowd is pressing in on this man. Jesus gets into Simon's boat and asks Simon to push out just a little bit. This act allows the crowd to come all the way to the shore and, more important, allows Jesus to amplify his voice over the water so that the crowds can hear him better. Jesus sits down in the boat (sitting was the common posture of a teacher and the crowd would stand and listen) and teaches the crowd from the boat. We do not know how long Jesus taught and we are not told the content of the message. But it is fair to assume that Jesus is teaching the good news about the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43).

Teaching Lesson (5:4-7)

After Jesus completes his teaching, he tells Simon to put out into the deep water and let down their nets for a catch. It is important for us to analyze what Jesus is telling Peter to do. The Greek word that translates into English "put out" is in the singular tense and the "your" in the command to "let down your nets" is plural. This is not Jesus and Peter by themselves. They are on Peter's fishing boat, which archaeology has found a typical fishing boat in those days in Galilee to be between 20 and 30 feet. The plural tense tells us that Peter and his fishing crew are on the boat. Jesus instructed Peter, who is in charge of directing and steering the boat, to take the vessel out into the deep water. Further, once in the deep water, Jesus has instructed the whole fishing crew to resume fishing. Everyone on the boat is to let down the massive fishing nets. Jesus is saying in effect, "Peter, let's go back out into the deep and let's do some fishing."

This helps us understand Peter's response. Here is a rabbi telling a fishing crew how to do their job. This would be like someone like myself, a full time teacher, having the audacity to go to Alaska and telling the fishing crew on a professional ship to listen on how to fish. The fishing crew has come in from their fishing trip and were unsuccessful. But I, the preacher, know where we ought to go and get some fish. WHO AM I? Why would they listen to me? Leave the fishing to the professionals! This is the

response of Peter, who says this in the most respectful way that he can. "Master, we've worked hard all night long and caught nothing!" Essentially, Peter is saying, "Jesus, this is not going to work. We have already tried. In fact, we have tried all night and we have worked hard all night. We caught nothing. That is why we were cleaning our nets. We are done for the night!" Notice the "we" in Peter's response. This validates our observation concerning Jesus' command. Jesus is instructing the whole fishing crew to get back to work. Further, don't forget what Jesus told Peter and the fishermen. He did not say, "Put out into the deep water and let's go fishing." Rather, Jesus said to put out into the deep water and "let down your nets for a catch." Jesus is saying that they are going to catch fish. "Let down your nets and you are going to get fish." Peter's response is that there are no fish to be found today. They have already tried that and now we are tired from our hard work.

But I am fascinated that Peter does not refuse Jesus' instruction despite all of these factors. Peter does not reject Jesus' directions. Peter questions it, but relents with an "ok." "But at your word, I'll let down the nets." Essentially, Peter is saying, "Jesus, this is going to be an utter failure. But this is on you. You say where to drop the nets and we will drop the nets. Just say the word."

I like the reluctance of Peter because it teaches us something valuable. We don't have to understand the reason for Jesus' commands for us to obey him. Sometimes we are unwilling to obey because we simply cannot understand how this command is godly or helpful to our lives. The Proverbs are a great example. No one wants to listen and obey the wisdom contained in it. We can't understand how its wise teachings will be helpful to us. So we don't do them. We don't obey because it does not make sense. I want to press something upon us here. Peter did not understand this command in the slightest. It did not make sense. It was utter nonsense to listen to this teacher about where to fish. There was nothing logical about what Jesus said to do. So why did Peter obey? Peter obeyed because it was Jesus. Peter obeyed because it was Jesus who gave the command. Peter had been listening to Jesus teach from his boat. He was sitting right there. Peter, despite his reluctance, obeys because it was Jesus who said to do it. So Peter put some trust in Jesus and did it, even though he did not think it was going to work. Peter did what Jesus said. We need to do the same. Jesus said it and that is why I will do it, even though it does not seem to make sense. Even if I don't think it is going to work or change my life, try it. Obey Jesus and see what happens next!

Peter's Response (5:6-11)

They let down the nets and they caught a great number of fish. The number is so great that the nets start breaking. Peter and his men wave for another boat to come over and help. They pull up the nets and fill both boats with the fish. Both boats are so full that both boats are beginning to sink from the mass and weight. This is an unbelievable catch! This is a miracle. The impossible has just happened. What is Peter's response to this event? Please notice that Peter does not say that we could make a lot of money with you around. Peter does not say that we need to have you come on all our fishing trips. Remember that these men are not fishing as a hobby. This is their livelihood. This is the way that they paid the bills and fed their families. Peter could have seen Jesus as the answer to his financial problems. Peter could have seen Jesus as the answer to all his physical needs and wants. But this is not the concern of Peter. We see the spirituality of Peter at this moment. Peter gets it.

Peter falls and the knees of Jesus and says, "Go away from me, because I'm a sinful man, Lord!" Peter immediately understands the lesson. The lesson is not that you can have wealth and fortune by following Jesus. Peter at this moment realizes who Jesus is and Peter knows what this means. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Christ, the prophesied deliverer and Savior. Peter knows who he is, "A sinful man." Peter knows who Jesus is, "The Holy One of God." This is the right reaction when we realizing who we are dealing with. We are not dealing with any average person. We are dealing with Jesus, the

Son of God, the Holy One of God. Peter's reaction is the same reaction that many had in the presence of God. Isaiah was acutely aware of sin when he was placed before the throne of God in a vision sequence. Ezekiel and John fell down as dead men in the presence of God. Peter gets it. There is not arrogance when in the presence of Jesus. There is no thinking that we are something when we come to Jesus. There is only one thing that should be on our mind as we come to Jesus: we are sinful and we cannot be around Jesus because we are so sinful.

Jesus' Response (5:10)

We must appreciate Jesus' response. Jesus would have been right to say, "Peter, you are sinful and you cannot be around me because I am the Holy One of God." Instead, Jesus tells Peter, "Don't be afraid." Jesus' words to us is the same, "Don't be afraid." We are to come to Jesus in our sins. We do not need to separate ourselves from Jesus. Jesus wants us to come to him. Jesus is welcoming us to him. He wants people to see their sinfulness, not to run away from him, but to come to him.

Jesus also gives Peter a new mission. Instead of catching fish, he will be catching people. Following Jesus is not about making money. Following Jesus is not about us continuing to do what we always have done. Jesus gives you a new mission. The mission is not a selfish mission of accumulating wealth or remaining in our comfort zones. Our mission is a soul saving mission. Our mission is for every person to become fishers of people. This does not mean that we necessarily quit the jobs we are currently occupying. We will read in the gospels later that Peter, James, and John are still fishing. We assume they are still doing this to pay the bills and take care of their families. But fishing was not their primary work any longer. Now we will be working for Jesus. Since Jesus is the Son of God and we recognize our sinfulness, then we must accept our new mission. Things change when we encounter Jesus.

Peter, James, and John accept the mission. They bring the boats to the shore, leave everything behind, and follow Jesus. Luke is painting a powerful picture for us with verse 11. What did Peter, James, and John leave behind? The text says they left everything. What did that include? The fish. The mountain of fish that could have made them a tremendous amount of money for such short work was left behind. To follow Jesus is not only to become a fisher for people but is also to leave behind the ways of the world. We are called upon to leave behind the things that the world deems important and care about the things that God deems important. There is no time or point in seeking after power, success, or wealth when we have been instructed with a new focus and mission — seek after people.

Applications:

1. See our sinfulness in the presence of the Son of God
2. Jesus wants you to come to him for salvation from your sins. He does not want you to turn away because of your sins.
3. Accept your new mission — seek to save people, not to advance ourselves in this world.

Luke is continuing to reveal Jesus to us. Who is this person and why should we follow him? In the last lesson we noticed Peter understanding that Jesus is the Holy One of God. Peter, James, and John leave their nets and follow him. This leads us into three stories that will help us more fully understand who this Jesus is.

Jesus Cleanses (Luke 5:12-16)

The first thing that we are going to see is that Jesus is able to cleanse. Most translations call this man's affliction "leprosy." However, this can be misleading. This word is used to refer to all kinds of skin diseases. Unfortunately, when talking about leprosy we only think about Hansen's Disease where the skin turns white and appendages begin to fall off. But a reading of Leviticus 13-14 reveals that a variety of skin diseases are in view that caused a person to be unclean. We should not imagine that the person who comes to Jesus has Hansen's Disease. However, notice the emphasis that is given to the severity of his condition. He is "full of leprosy." This was an idiom for a serious condition (NET Bible). This means he had "a serious skin disease all over him," as the HCSB translates. Whatever this skin disease is, this man is in very bad shape.

Further, this man has been suffering from ostracism. Notice the command given to a person in his condition. **"The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp" (Leviticus 13:45-46; ESV).**

This is important to understand because we are reading about the bravery of this man to approach Jesus in this condition. Imagine the man as he is approaching Jesus is covering his mouth while shouting, "Unclean, unclean!" This man must have heard about the healing Jesus was doing. He has been ostracized by the nation, but while Jesus is in the city this man who is full of skin diseases approaches Jesus.

Be sure to notice the words of the man with leprosy. He does not ask Jesus if he is able to heal of his disease. There is no doubt in his mind that Jesus has the power to heal him. The only question is if Jesus is willing. "You CAN make me clean!" The question is if Jesus is willing to heal this man.

Now we need to be surprised by what Jesus does. We know by reading the other miracles of Jesus that Jesus could have simply said the word and this man would have been healed of this severe skin disease. But Jesus does something he did not have to do. Jesus touches the man. He touches him. We should be screaming in our minds, "What are you doing? You are going to be defiled! You are going to catch his disease! You will be unclean!" But that is not what happens, as Luke is clear to point out. Rather than Jesus becoming unclean, the leper becomes clean. Jesus reaches out his hand, touches him, and says, "I am willing; be made clean." Immediately the disease left. Jesus instructs the man to go to the priest as required by the Law of Moses who would pronounce him clean and he would be allowed to live and function in the nation again, no longer ostracized.

KEY: Jesus has the willingness to cleanse and the power to cleanse those who come to him.

Jesus Forgives and Heals (Luke 5:17-26)

Jesus now encounters the Pharisees and the teacher of the Law of Moses. The Pharisees were one of four religious groups within first century Judaism. They had the goal of keeping the people faithful to the Law of Moses. The problem is that they attempted to achieve this goal they developed traditions that

ruled on how the Law of Moses was to be applied to various situations. They were not a popular group (in fact, very few Jews were Pharisees), but they did wield quite a bit of influence within Judaism. The teachers of the law are also called the scribes who supported the development of these extrabiblical traditions. Their motive was to preserve and contextualize the biblical teaching into new settings (Bock, 479).

Jesus is teaching and healing in a home and there are great crowds that are listening to him and following him. Some men bring a man on a stretcher who is paralyzed. But they cannot get into the house where Jesus is at. But these men are not dissuaded from trying to bring this paralyzed man to Jesus. They go up on the roof and let him down on his stretcher into the midst of the crowd before Jesus. To help visualize this scene properly, here is some background information. The roof was a typical house in Palestine was somewhat flat and was about six feet above the ground. Further, there were steps that would lead up to the roof. The roof typically consisted of some wood beams laid across the top of the stone or mud walls. The roofing material was layers was reeds, thorns, and several inches of clay on top of them (Bock, 480). So we should not visualize the size of one of our houses and what it would take to dig through shingles and drywall. But this was not an easy act either. Great effort and diligence is shown to get this paralyzed man into the presence of Jesus.

When Jesus saw their faith.... Wait. What did Jesus see that showed faith? Jesus saw the great effort made by these men to access Jesus. They would do whatever it took to make sure that this man could be before Jesus for healing. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." Now this is not why these men brought the paralyzed man before Jesus. One can easily imagine the paralyzed man thinking that he came for physical healing. But it seems that Jesus' words have taken everyone by surprise. "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus does something to get the wheels of the Pharisees' minds turning. Jesus does not simply heal the paralyzed man. He tells the paralyzed man that his sins are forgiven. The point is to get the people to think: who is this person who is saying he can forgive sins? Who is this Jesus?

The point that the Pharisees make is correct. Only God can forgive sins. No one else has the ability, right, or power to forgive sins. Only God can forgive sins. Jesus seizes on this thought and reveals who he truly is. "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'" Think about this question for a moment. Which is easier to say? It is much easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven you" because the claim cannot be visually verified. If I say your sins are forgiven, no one knows if the sins have been forgiven. But if you say to a paralyzed person, "Get up and walk," this is far more difficult because we will be able to see if the person has been healed or not. This is the point Jesus is making, as we notice in verse 24.

So that people would know that Jesus has the authority on the earth to forgive sins, he told the paralyzed man, "Get up, pick up your stretcher, and go home." Immediately, the paralyzed man gets up, picks up the stretcher, and walks right out the house going on to his own home. Do we see what Jesus did? To prove that Jesus can do the easier thing (forgive sins), he did the greater thing (healing a paralyzed man). The healing shows that Jesus' words of forgiveness are not empty words. The paralyzed man's sins were forgiven. The proof of Jesus' authority to forgive sins is the miracle of healing the paralyzed man. To state the issue before us in another way: Is Jesus' claim to forgive sins an empty word or the real thing? Is God's power behind Jesus' declaration to forgive sins? The healing proves who Jesus is. Remember that the Pharisees rightly declared, "Only God can forgive sins." Jesus has shown that he is God because he does forgive sins.

To validate this point further, notice that Jesus calls himself, "The Son of Man." This is the favorite term that Jesus uses of himself. The reference point of this title comes from Daniel 7:13-14.

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13–14; ESV)

The Son of Man is the Messiah who was given all authority, glory, and a kingdom from God so that everyone would serve him. Jesus just said that he is that person. He has come with power and authority and that authority includes the forgiveness of sins.

KEY: Jesus has the authority and the power to forgive sins. Luke gives us one more story and then we can tie all of this together.

Jesus Came To Save The Lost (Luke 5:27-32)

In verse 27 we are told about Levi (who is also called Matthew) who leaves everything to follow Jesus, just like Peter, James, and John. Levi leaves behind the tax office and follows Jesus. Levi holds a great banquet that included a large crowd of tax collectors. Jewish tax collectors were hated by the Jews because they were considered traitors by working for the Roman Empire. Further, tax collectors were deceitful, often charging more than what was due and pocketing the difference. Tax collectors were hated, vile people that were placed on the same level of sin in the Jewish mind as the prostitutes. Notice that Jesus and his disciples are also at this banquet. Being at this banquet brings out the problem.

The Pharisees and the scribes were complaining to the disciples of Jesus. "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Can you hear the criticism? "Jesus can't be from God because he is associating himself with these vile people! What are you doing following Jesus and defiling yourself by being around these tax collectors and sinners?" "How can you have a meal with these people? How can you spend time with them? How can you have a social bond with them? How can you have fellowship these people?"

Jesus' answer is powerful. "The healthy don't need a doctor, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." This is why I hate going to the doctor. Do you know who sits in the doctor's office? SICK PEOPLE! A doctor must constantly be around sick people. There is no other way to make them well. The doctor cannot be valuable if he only spends his time around the well. He must be around the sick if he is going to do his job.

Point: Our mission must be the same as Jesus' mission. We must do everything possible to save the sick souls in the world. We must have the attitude that the sick need to hear the gospel and we must go to the sick. We cannot have the attitude of the Pharisees who did not want to be around sinners. We cannot look at the world as sinful people who will defile our righteousness. They are sick and we must bring them the cure of Jesus. Our teaching must be about bringing people to Jesus. Our worship must assist the lost in coming to Jesus. Jesus came to call sinners to repentance. We must also spend time around sinners to call them to repentance. There is no other way. If all we do is focus on each other, then we are missing the mission that Jesus has given to us and we are not like Jesus. We must focus on the lost. We must do things that encourage people to follow Jesus.

But Jesus' point goes deeper. Let me ask a question: When do you go to the doctor? Let me point out to you that it is NOT when you are sick. We all get sick and the first response is not to go to the doctor. We want and see if we can get over it ourselves. **We go to the doctor when we know we are sick and we need help getting well.** We only go to the doctor when we understand that we are sick and realize that we need help to get well. This is Jesus' point about not coming to save the righteous. It is not like there were righteous people that did not Jesus. There is none righteous, no not one (Romans 3). The point is that he did not come to save the people who think they are well. Jesus can't save them

because they did not understand they are sick and need a Savior to make them well. This was the problem of the Pharisees. They did not know they were sick and did not realize they needed Jesus to make them well. They thought they were fine. They did not recognize that they were full of sins just like everyone else. Jesus can help and heal those who recognize they need a Savior.

This thought is how the three stories tie together. The man with serious skin diseases did not care about the reaction of society and boldly went to Jesus asking for cleansing. The paralyzed man along with those who carried him boldly went to Jesus for healing and nothing would stop them from coming to Jesus. Jesus has the willingness to cleanse us. Jesus has the power and authority to forgive us of our sins. Jesus comes to sinners so that he can heal them. Jesus can heal you. He is the great doctor. Will you see that you are sick with sins and that you need him?

The Bridegroom (5:33-39)

In the last lesson we noticed the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law complaining that Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners. Luke records another complaint about Jesus and his disciples. The complaint is that John's disciples fast often and the disciples of the Pharisees also fast. So why aren't Jesus' disciples fasting? Jesus' response offers another image concerning who Jesus is. Jesus calls himself the bridegroom. "Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days."

The wedding feast and bridegroom imagery were messianic images used to refer to the time of the Messiah's coming. This is an image that Jesus applies to himself. Jesus describes himself as the bridegroom and his disciples as the wedding guests. Why would the wedding guests fast when the bridegroom is here? The guests only fast when waiting for the bridegroom. Jesus explains that the John's disciples fasted in hope and anticipation of the messianic age. My disciples do not fast because the messianic age has arrived. There is nothing to fast in hope toward. Jesus has added another layer to his description. We have seen him described as the Holy One of God, the Son of God, and the Son of Man. Now we see Jesus teaching that he is the one who is ushering in the messianic age where God's rule would be established through his kingdom (Daniel 2) and the salvation of Israel would come (cf. Isaiah 25:6-8; 55:1-13; 65:13-14).

But notice something very interesting. Jesus does not say that the bridegroom is going to stay with his wedding guests in perpetuity. In verse 35 Jesus says the bridegroom is taken away from them. Consider that Jesus does not say that the bridegroom leaves. Rather, he is taken away, which indicates a violent removal (Ryken, 237). Geldenhuys points out that this means "a violent removal by death" (NICNT, 196). However, the BDAG Greek lexicon states, "Yet there is no need to assume the necessity of force." We know the way Jesus was "taken away" from the guests was through the crucifixion. Jesus is making the point that he will not be staying but will be leaving. When that happens, only then will it be appropriate for his disciples to fast. This is the key point being made: Jesus is the bridegroom and it is not appropriate for his disciples to fast while he is here. When Jesus is taken away, then his disciples will fast.

Jesus tells a parable to further illustrate his point. Most commentators see Jesus contrasting the old covenant and the new covenant in these parables. I disagree with their assessment for a couple of reasons. First, I believe it is too early in Jesus' ministry to be teaching the end of the Law of Moses. Early in the life of Jesus we read of Jesus teaching about the fulfillment of the Law, not the ending of it (cf. Matthew 5:17). To preach the end of the Law this early in his ministry would close off all Jewish ears to his teaching. Second, these parables do not read right if Jesus is discussing the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new covenant. In verse 36 I do not believe Jesus is saying that no one takes a piece of the new covenant and patches it to the old covenant. I do not believe any one would have understood Jesus if this is what he meant. There is not a new covenant in effect yet. How could they be trying to take parts of the new covenant and patch it over the old covenant? It does not make any sense. Again, verses 37-38 reveal the same difficulties. Verse 39 is the point that blows up the idea that Jesus is contrasting the covenants. "No one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.'" Underline the words, "No one." No one, after participating in the old covenant, desires the new covenant because the old covenant is good? If Jesus is contrasting the covenant, he should have said the reverse, that is, that no one will desire the old once they drink the new. The standard interpretation is that the Jews would reject the new covenant to keep the old covenant. But I respond that they did not

know they were rejecting the new covenant. Further, I think it is too much to say that, “no one” after drinking the old wine desires the new. We cannot suggest that there were no faithful Jews. We have already read about Joseph, Mary, Elizabeth, Zachariah, Anna, Simeon, Peter, James, John, and Levi who are faithful Jews that are accepting Jesus.

So what is Jesus teaching in the parables? Remember that the parable must explain the teaching point about his disciples not fasting. A contrast of the covenant does not explain why Jesus’ disciples do not fast. Rather, Jesus is merely illustrating why the disciples do not fast. It is inappropriate. It is inappropriate for his disciples to fast, just as it is inappropriate to cut a piece off of new clothes to patch old clothes. Just as it is inappropriate to put new wine in old wineskins. Just as it is inappropriate to offer new wine after people have drunk the old wine because it will not be desired. Jesus is not talking about a change of the law. Rather, Jesus is illustrating that he is the bridegroom and his disciples do not fast because it would be completely inappropriate. The one Israel has been waiting for has arrived. There is no need to fast for his coming now that he has come.

The Lord of Sabbath (6:1-11)

Luke records another event that causes controversy among the Pharisees. Jesus and his disciples are walking through the grainfields on the Sabbath. As they are walking through, they are plucking some of the heads of grain and eating it, after rubbing the heads of grain in their hands. Gleaning by hand was permitted under the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 23:25). But the eating of the grain was not the problem for the Pharisees. Their problems was that it was on a Sabbath. According to their laws, not the law of Moses, to rub the heads of grain was considering threshing and the Mishnah forbid threshing on the Sabbath (*Shabbath* 7.2). Jesus and his disciples are not breaking the Law of Moses. They are breaking the laws and traditions of the scribes and Pharisees.

How Jesus responds to this charge is fascinating. Jesus could have said that he was not breaking the Law of Moses but just their traditions. Jesus will do that later one when the Pharisees charge them with not washing their hands in accordance to the traditions of the elders. But that is not how Jesus responds here. Jesus wants to go deeper and truly address the heart of the problem. Jesus reminds them of an event in David’s life.

In those days God had rejected Saul and anointed David to serve as king over Israel. But Saul was not dead yet, and because of Saul’s envy, David had to run for his life. David and his men left in such haste that they did not gather much in the way of provisions. So they went to the tabernacle, where Ahimelech was priest and asked for bread. However, there was no common bread available. All that was left was the holy bread that was kept on the table of showbread. This bread was only for the priests to eat and no one else (Leviticus 24). For David and his men to eat the holy bread was a violation of the law of Moses. In fact, even Jesus says that they “took and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat.” Jesus says that this act was unlawful.

So what is Jesus’ point? Is it that David broke the law, so I can break the law also? Not at all! Jesus is arguing from a harder case to an easier case. If it was proper for David’s men to eat the holy bread, then it was also proper for Jesus’ disciples to pick grainheads on the Sabbath. This is not the only instance where we read of the breaking of God’s law being approved. Allow me to show you a few other places besides David eating the holy bread.

Exodus 1:15-20 reveals that Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill the baby boys when they were born. The Hebrew midwives disobeyed the command to kill the baby boys and were not honest with the king of Egypt that Hebrew midwives give birth before they get to them. Where can we go in the scriptures to show that the Hebrew midwives were right in what they did since they were

commended by God? These midwives were not honest and they were not obedient to the law of the land.

James 2:25 reveals that Rahab was justified when she sent the spies another way and did not hand them over to the officials of Jericho. Rahab lies and tells the officials that the spies went another direction when in fact she was hiding them. Where can we go in the scriptures to show that she was right to lie to save the life of the spies?

Leviticus 10:16-20 shows that Eleazer and Ithamar did not eat of the sin offering as commanded. What scripture could we go to show that there was an exception to the law of eating the sin offering? Where can we show that they were correct and it was necessary to disobey an explicit command of God?

John 5:8-10,18 records a paralyzed man being healed. Jesus tells the man to take up his bed and walk on the Sabbath. The Law of Moses forbid this. No one was to carry a burden on the Sabbath. In Jeremiah 17:21-22 we read Jeremiah condemning the people for carrying a burden on the Sabbath. Carrying the bed was a violation of the Sabbath law. There is no wiggle room on this. It is not a violation of the Pharisees' traditions. It was a violation of the law. What scripture can we use to show that what Jesus did was not a violation of the Sabbath? There are more passages that we could examine, but I hope that this is enough to see the point. There are not any specific statements authorizing the circumstances that would make not eating the sin offering acceptable, lying acceptable, or carrying a burden on the Sabbath acceptable. There are no exceptions when we read the law. But Jesus comes along and says that the exceptions are obvious. Jesus' answer to the Pharisees in Luke 6:3 begins, "Have you not read...." Essentially, Jesus is amazed that the Pharisees cannot understand there are exceptions, even when not explicitly stated.

In the parallel account in Matthew, Jesus verbalizes the exception clause that the Jews were to have understood in their application of God's law. Notice that Matthew 12:1-8 contains the same story. But there is an important sentence that Matthew records, verbalize this exception. "And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless" (12:7; ESV). This is a quotation from Hosea 6:6. What did God mean through Hosea? The people of Israel were still offering their sacrifices and giving of their worship, but they were neglecting the clear principles of godliness like justice, righteousness, mercy, and love. Later in Luke we will see Jesus condemning the Pharisees for tithing every little thing, but neglecting the weightier matters of law like justice, mercy, faithfulness, and the love of God (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42).

So what is Jesus teaching about David eating the holy bread? What does it mean that God desires mercy and not sacrifice? Unfortunately, many take this to mean that God's laws are just suggestions. Others go to the other extreme and ignore this very important teaching because we want to have every law in black and white. But I think the principle that Jesus is teaching is clear. Our application of God's law cannot violate the character of God. God's laws are firm and steadfast. They are not suggestions or recommendations. God clearly said that if we do these things we will live. But the underlying implication was that we would apply God's law in such a way to violate God's character of love, mercy, faithfulness, and justice.

Watch how this works in the biblical examples we have examined in this lesson. David and his men are running for their lives from Saul who is trying to kill them. They are hungry and need to keep moving. Should the priest have told David that they must all die of hunger? Of course not. The priest did the right thing to do because preserving life is greater than the law concerning the holy bread. Does this mean that David could have woken up and decided on any given day to go each the holy bread? Of course not. To do so would have been rebellion and he probably would have been struck dead by God for doing so. But if the priest had not given David the holy bread in this circumstance would have violated the other principles and laws of God concerning mercy and life.

Look at the example of Rahab, who is considered an example of faith. Rahab knew that these spies were sent by God and she wanted to be spared of the coming judgment against Jericho. She lies about the spies to keep them alive. That was the right thing to do in the circumstance because to hand the spies over to the authorities of Jericho would have violated God's law of mercy and life. Does this mean that it was okay for Rahab to lie about anything? Of course not! To do such would be rebellion. That is why we do not read of any exceptions against the law of lying. But we cannot apply the law in such a way that God violate God's character and God's laws. The same is true of the Hebrew midwives. Keeping the baby boys alive was the right thing to do. God did not want them killing the babies.

Illustration: Here is a real life example, not a hypothetical. A man I know had a knock at the door at his home. He opens the door to find a gun pointed to his face. The man asks for his car keys and for his wife. He gives him his wallet and keys but says that his wife is not home. Was he wrong for lying? Should he have said that she was down the hall? Of course not! To tell the robber where she was would have violated the laws of God for life, mercy, and justice. It does not make lying right. But it was the right thing to do in that circumstance because God's law and God's character superseded the law to be truthful and honest.

Consider another real life example. After Hurricane Andrew, churches sent all sorts of supplies to the Christians who were suffering from the devastation. Were these Christians not supposed to share their supplies with others who were in need? Were they to say that church benevolence is only for needy saints, so we cannot give you a bottle of water? Of course not! To do so would violate God's laws of mercy and life. Does this mean that churches can use their money to support food banks and soup kitchens? Of course not! To do so would violate God's commands. But we are realizing that there are rare exceptions when the application of God's law would cause us to violate God's law, God's character, and God's nature. This is what Jesus is teaching. We cannot apply God's law in such a way to violate God's character. **"Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice'" (Matthew 9:13; ESV).**

This is what Jesus is teaching in Luke 6. Life, justice, and mercy cannot be violated in order to keep the Sabbath. We pointed out that this is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If David was right to eat the holy bread even though eating was unlawful, then Jesus and his disciples are right to glean on the Sabbath and do such was not unlawful. Jesus seems to be saying that even if you wanted to call what the disciples were doing as work, it was not unlawful because they are hungry. The Sabbath was not to make people starve to death.

Withered Hand (6:6-11)

In our final moments, I want us to look at Luke 6:6-11 and notice that this is exactly what Jesus teaches a second time. According to the Pharisees' rules, healing and medical work was not to be done on the Sabbath, unless a life was in danger, a baby was being born, or a circumcision needed to be performed. As an aside, consider that the Jews were already applying this principle to a degree. It was commanded a child be circumcised on the eighth day. So even though it would be work to perform the circumcision, it was allowed because not doing so would violate another of God's laws. You see that we understand this. We simply are not very consistent in our application. This is what Jesus is condemning.

The Pharisees are watching to see if Jesus is going to heal on the Sabbath. Knowing this, Jesus intentionally acts. He does not avoid the controversy. He knows that the Pharisees are misapplying God's law and that they have evil motives. Look at Jesus' words: "I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" God's law was not to prevent us from doing what is good and right. God's law was not to be an excuse for not doing what is good and right. Why is it okay to help someone in a terrible car on the way to worship service and "forsake the assembling of the saints?" It is

okay because we cannot apply God's law in such a way to violate God's law of life, love, and righteousness. So Jesus heals the man with a withered hand.

Applications:

1. Do not keep our traditions over God's law. The Pharisees did this repeatedly.
2. Do not apply God's law in such a way as to violate God's law of justice, righteousness, faithfulness, mercy, and love. The Pharisees did this with the Corban. They would not take care of their parents because they were giving to the temple. Why was that wrong? Because we cannot apply God's law in such a way to violate God's law of justice, righteousness, faithfulness, mercy, and love.
3. Be consistent in how we understand God's law. Jesus points out that if David was okay in what he did, then Jesus' disciples were okay in what they did. Be consistent. Apply God's law appropriately and consistently.
4. Exceptions do not make new laws. Just because David ate the holy bread once did not mean it was lawful to eat the holy bread. Just because Rahab lied did not mean it was okay to lie. Just because a healed man carrying his bed broke the Sabbath did not mean it was okay to break the Sabbath. God's laws are strong and firm and must be obeyed at all times. That is the rule. Just understand that we cannot apply God's law in such a way to break God's law of mercy, justice, and righteousness.

Apostles Selected (6:12-16)

Jesus is about to make an important decision. The decision is so important that Jesus goes out to a mountain and prays all night to God. When the day comes, Jesus calls his followers and chooses twelve of them. He calls them "apostles." The word "apostle" literally means "one sent," picturing a messenger. But these twelve are not just mere messengers for Jesus. These twelve men were to function as his representatives and mouthpieces for the message of the kingdom. It should not surprise us that Jesus selects twelve followers to be his apostles. Just as the twelve sons of Jacob founded the Old Testament people of God, so also the twelve apostles established the foundation of the new people of God (Ephesians 2:20). One other thing is worthy of observation before we move forward. There are four lists recorded in the New Testament of the apostles' names. Peter's name is always first and Judas Iscariot's name is always last. This is also with good reason since Judas would betray Jesus and Peter leads the twelve and represents them.

What The Good Life Looks Like, What Looks Like The Good Life But Isn't (6:17-26)

Verses 17-19 reveals that great crowds of his disciples and great multitudes of people from all over the surrounding regions, and even Jerusalem, were coming to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. I love the subtlety of verse 19. **"And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all."** The power of healing is just pouring out of Jesus. Power is coming out of him. Have you thought about the gravity of Luke's statement? People are just trying to touch him because power was coming out from Jesus and touching Jesus would make them well. Imagine the multitudes crowding Jesus and people pushing to try to touch Jesus. This would be worse than what Hollywood celebrities deal with from the paparazzi. Every step Jesus takes would have people crowding into him to touch him. So Jesus stops and begins to teach. This section of teaching has often been called, "The Sermon on the Plain." The lesson is similar to the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew's gospel. But there are some very serious differences that should cause us to see the Sermon on the Plain as a separate, unique sermon that is not parallel to the Sermon on the Mount.

One of the unique features of this sermon is that Jesus does not just teach who is blessed, like the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus not only teaches who are blessed but also offers the counterbalance of woes: those who are going to experience pain and anguish. Notice the first blessing and woe combination.

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation (vs. 20,24).

This is probably a fairly shocking statement that may even bother us and cause us to be uncomfortable. Luke recorded earlier that the gospel Jesus promised to preach was "good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). This teaching goes contrary to the way we think religion operates. We want to read the Sermon on the Mount into the text at this moment and say that what Jesus means are those who are "poor in spirit." But that is not what Jesus said. Theophilus did not have Matthew's gospel and no one reading this sentence would think that Jesus is talking about the poor in spirit. Jesus is talking about material possessions. Verse 24 confirms that Jesus is talking about material possessions when he pronounces a woe on the rich. The problem is that many measure God's blessing in their lives by looking at their bank accounts. Jesus is teaching us to throw that kind of thinking away. It is the people who are poor who can be blessed by God. God's kingdom is for people who do not seek their wealth and life in

earthly things. Rather, God's kingdom is for people who acknowledge their own poverty and come to Jesus for true life (Geldenhuys, 210).

Why? Why is the kingdom of God for the poor? The reason is that the poor are those who will seek after God. Those who are well off financially do not see their need. They think they have all their need. Churches often make enormous mistakes by moving out of the downtown of a city and relocating to the suburbs because it is the poor, those who have nothing to rely on in this world materially, that begin to seek God. The more we have, the greater difficulty in seeking after God because we have so many other things that get in the way. We are comfortable and our priorities are upside. The corresponding woe helps us understand what Jesus is driving at and pressing into us. The rich have received their consolation and comfort. We are happy because we have material things. Our rest is not in Jesus, but in the couch. Our leisure is in the television, not in the word of God. We check Facebook more often than we check in with God in prayer. We have things that distract our attention away from God. I hope we are broken by the thought that our material possessions are quenching the fire for serving God. Perhaps we are the ones that Jesus would say to sell all we had to be his disciple. We are constantly assaulted with the temptation to rely on our riches. We are dulled to our spiritual needs because we have so much physically. Blessed are the poor because they do not have the distractions, possessions, and wealth that pull us away from the service and love that God demands.

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry (vs. 21,25).

Those who are not satisfied with the things of this world are blessed. Blessed are those who are not comfortable now. We are not to be content with living in this world. We are not to find our satisfaction in the things of this world. This thought follows the sentiment of one of our popular Christian hymns, *This World Is Not My Home*. When we are filled on the things of this world, then we stop looking for the things God has to offer. We do not act like we are strangers living in tents on this earth. We have our wealth and we have our homes and we have given this world our allegiance. I fear that we have grown too comfortable in this world. We find too much of our joy in this world and not in God. Our lives are simply too focused on this world. Jesus tells us that there are sorrows and anguish to those who are full now because we will be hungry. We are failing to recognize how much we are going to miss by being satisfied with the things of this world. We fail to consider how much will be lost to us when the glory of the Lord is revealed. The satisfactions and comforts of this world are not worth missing the riches of eternity in the presence of our heavenly Father. David pictures the kind of desire we are to have for God now.

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:1-2; ESV)

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1; ESV)

When we find our love and satisfaction in the things of this world, then we will not have this longing. Living in lack gives us something to look toward.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep (vs. 21,25). One quickly becomes aware of the common theme of these beatitudes. Our life joy cannot be of this world. We cannot find all of our pleasure and all of our desires in this world. If our joy is in this world, then we will be sorry because we are going to miss out on the great joy when Christ returns. Too many who claim to be Christians are living for all there is to find in this life. They want to fulfill all their desires and pleasures. There are many sorrows to come for those who live to party now and

seek after the joys of this world, rather than the spiritual joys and pleasures from God. Society tells us to do what makes us happy. Jesus says there is a problem with that. You may have some joys now, but there will be eternal consequences for those choices. Living for yourself and living for the now will bring consequences.

Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. (vs. 22-23,26)

People are going to hate you if you have a devotion to Jesus. Following Christ and popularity do not go together. We are not going to fit. We will not be part of the crowd. Light stands in contrast to darkness. If people readily accept us, then we are not living a godly life. People are not going to like what we believe. People are not going to like what we teach. They are not going to like that we hold to an objective standard of morality. They are going to exclude us and revile us when we obey the word of God.

Do you see what Jesus says to do when we suffer because of Jesus. Rejoice! Rejoice and leap for joy because you know that you have a great reward in heaven. Understand that we have made the right choice. We cannot be people pleasers, but God pleasers. We cannot please God and please all people. We have a saying that you can't please everyone. Those words are so true. But let's add to that proverb. If you try to please everyone, you will not please God. If you please God, you will not please people. A disciple of Jesus must understand that we cannot live our lives by opinion polls. We cannot be worried if a doctrine is unpopular. We cannot attempt to do things in worship to please and attract the masses. We must offer the word of God which has the power to change the lives of every person. Rock bands, drama skits, and children's activities are going to please people, but not God. God wants us to ask, "What will please my master?" We cannot be people pleasers.

Finally, notice the final jab that Jesus takes. The final phrase in verse 23, "For so their fathers did to the prophets." This is an eye opening statement. It is not only the world that is going to hate you, exclude you, revile you, and spurn your name as evil, but even those who claim to be followers of God will do the same. The prophets experienced this kind of ridicule and persecution from Israel. Further, Israel spoke well of the false prophets who tickled the people's ears and told them what they wanted to hear (6:26). We will suffer at the hands of people who claim to be Christians. If everyone who claims to be a Christians speaks well of you, it is reason for pause because Jesus said we may not be on the right track at all. We can receive criticism for doing right even from those who are supposed to be living right. Do not be surprised or dismayed. Rejoice and leap for joy because those who claimed to be the people of God had Jesus, in all his righteousness and good works, killed.

Application:

For this lesson I want for us to take home one key thought: Will you treasure Jesus more than anything else? Unfortunately we often treasure anything else above Jesus and it shows in our decisions. We do not give much time to God. We do not come to worship and Bible studies. We do not pray. We do not read the scriptures. We do not serve our brothers and sisters in Christ. We do not teach Bible classes. We treasure anything else above Jesus.

Keep this in mind. What looks like the good life in this world isn't the good life at all. They are temporary pleasures that will bring consequences from the Lord. Jesus preached the gospel to the masses on what the good life truly looks like. Treasure and seek after Jesus above anything else and the kingdom of God is yours and you will be satisfied.

The Hardest Commandment
Luke 6:27-36

After teaching the disciples and the crowd about who is blessed and who will receive woes, Jesus continues his teaching about what the people of God do and how the people of God act. What Jesus is commanding is rightly called the hardest commandment.

Love Your Enemies (6:27)

It is a command that seems beyond our ability to attain. Jesus calls us to love our enemies. Consider the context of this command. Jesus has called twelve disciples to be his apostles. These twelve apostles were the divinely appointed ambassadors who would preach his gospel to the world. After selected these twelve, Jesus teaches what it means to follow him. Jesus pronounces four blessings. His disciples would endure poverty, hunger, sorrow, and persecution, but in their suffering they would know his blessing. Jesus also pronounced four woes against self-satisfied people who were living for the pleasures of the moment and thought they could do without God. There are two kinds of people, according to what Jesus taught in 6:20-26: people who suffer for his sake and have his blessing, and people who live for themselves and will come to an unhappy end. We pointed out in the last lesson that when we are serving the Lord, people are going to hate us, exclude us, insult us, and reject us as evil (6:22). What are we to do about that response?

The natural response would be for us to hate them and hurt them. This was the philosophy of the world at that time. Lysias wrote, "I consider it established that one should do harm to one's enemies and be of service to one's friends." I believe the world has the same philosophy today. Unfortunately, Christians have adopted much of the same attitude. This was the problem in the first century as well where the Jews had also adopted this worldly philosophy. But God had clearly condemned this attitude in the scriptures.

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:18; NRSV)

Many rabbis, however, taught that this verse only applied to relationships within Israel. They taught that there were limits to brotherly love. In our terminology, it would be the same as teaching that we are not to take vengeance or bear a grudge to anyone who is a Christian. But you can bear the grudge to those outside the family of Christ. So this is the thinking that Jesus is teaching against when he gives these instructions. Unfortunately we do the same thing. We want to only love our friends and family. Jesus commands us to love our enemies. Thankfully, Jesus does not leave the command there. Jesus spends the rest of this section talking about what loving our enemies looks like.

What Loving Our Enemies Looks Like (6:27-31)

Do good to those who hate you. I think we believe we are doing well when we do not hate those who hate us. We become unshaken and unconcerned by those who hate us. But loving our enemies is not just simply a lack of retaliation. Loving our enemies does not mean that I do not punch them in the face. Loving our enemies does not mean that we do not treat them how they treat us. Jesus is calling for a positive action toward our enemies. Do good to those who hate you. There is no excuse for not treating a person well. We are never excused from this command. There is no, "Yeah, but he did such and such to me." We are never justified in not treating people well.

Bless those who curse you. Not only are our actions to be positive toward our enemies, but our words are also to be positive. The idea of blessing is to invoke God's favor on another's behalf or at least appeal to God for that person (Bock, 589). It is difficult to respond with words of grace and kindness

when someone is cursing us. We usually respond with the same fury and intensity that we are encountering. Jesus is calling for us to have an unnatural response.

Pray for those who mistreat you. Do not mistreat those who mistreat you. Do good for them, speak graciously of them, and pray to God for them. Pray to God that they will change their lives and repent. Pray to God that they will become a disciple of Jesus. Pray on the behalf of those that mistreat us. Stephen stands as a powerful example of this in Acts 6 as the people are stoning him to death.

If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other also. This illustration has unfortunately been used to teach that a person needs to get the tar beat out of them if someone comes up to them in a physical altercation. It is always important that we do not miss the cultural and religious context of the teachings that we read in the scriptures. The slap in the face is idiomatic for an insult. That idiom continued until not that long ago, where we have pictures of a prim and proper person slapping another in the cheek with a white glove. This is not a fist fight, but an insult. This explanation also fits Luke 6:22 where Jesus warned that we would be insulted for the sake of the Son of Man. When insulted, do not retaliate. Let people insult you. We must be willing to suffering insults and humiliation again and again for Christ. Do not respond in kind.

If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt. Jesus illustrates that we give, even to those who mistreat us. This may be referring to a street robbery. But it seems more likely that this is a person who has a legitimate need. We are to have concern for the other person. We are to be more concerned the person than the protection of our property. Even if people mistreat us, we must give them above and beyond what they need, to the point of making a real sacrifice. We have a hard time giving above and beyond to people that we like. Remember that the context is how to love our enemies. We will not give to our friends, our brothers and sisters in Christ, or our family. We think it is our stuff and we are stingy. We will not share. We will not give. It's mine, mine, mine, mine, mine. This attitude is despicable and ugly and does not reflect the attitude of those who are truly God's people. We not only meet the person's need, but go above and beyond to assist. This leads into verse 30.

Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Jesus is not talking about giving money to panhandlers or to people who will use money for an evil purpose. The rendering, "begs" in some translations is misleading. "Asks" is the appropriate thought. Not only should we give above and beyond, but we should give without demanding anything in return. This is a thought that Jesus will return to shortly. We need to ask, "What can I give?" without asking, "What will I get in return?" Jesus carries the idea even further that we would lend something to someone without demanding it back. Our concern for possessions should be so minimal that we will not care that other people use our possessions and do not return them.

Do to others as you would have them do to you. Finally, the overarching principle to guide how we are to love our enemies it to do to others as we want them to do to us. We often have reversed the principle in our living and even in our teaching. When one of my daughters does something to her sister, I teach them, "Is that something you would want them to do to you?" Of course they say, "no." This is how we reverse the principle. We typically think in terms of NOT doing something to others that we would not want done to us. I don't want people to be mean, so I will not be mean. Even the Jewish rabbis and writers instructed the people to not do to others what you would not have done to you. But this is NOT what Jesus taught. It is far easier to not do to others what we would not want done to ourselves. Jesus is teaching us to be proactive. DO to others what you would want them to do to you. If everyone only did to others what they would have done to themselves, it would change the world. Loving our enemies is at the very heart of being a disciple of Jesus.

The Reasoning Behind Loving Our Enemies (6:32-34)

Jesus finish this section of his sermon by explaining the reasoning behind loving our enemies and doing to others as we would have them do to us.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. If you only love people who love you, you have done nothing. Everyone loves those who love them. If you only do good to those who do good things for you, you have done nothing because everyone in the world does that. If you lend expecting to be repaid, you have done nothing because even banks expect to be repaid. I hope we see the point. We think we are doing something great when we love those who love us, do good to those who do good to us, and lend to those who we think can repay! Jesus says that we have done nothing because everyone does that. We are not acting like Jesus. We are acting like natural humans. We are acting like sinners, not like the holy people of God. We are not being godly. We are being worldly. Stop thinking that you are doing anything when you love those that love you and do good for those that do good for you. This is the reason that we are to love our enemies. If we do not love our enemies, then we are acting just like the world. Further, we are not acting in the character of God. How quickly we forget that while we were enemies, God loved us and sent his Son to die for us (Romans 5:6-11). Love your enemies.

Jesus' Final Instruction (6:35-36)

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Jesus summarizes his teaching. Love your enemies. Do good toward your enemies. Lend to your enemies and do not expect repayment. Notice the benefits of living this godly life.

(1) Your reward will be great. This is what the godly life is all about. It is difficult to do good to our enemies and not to retaliate. God is going to reward us for making these sacrifices. We cannot even begin to imagine what the reward will look like when the God who created all things says we will have a great reward.

(2) You will be children of the Most High. If you have been studying Romans with us on Sunday night then you know the weight of these words that we are declared children of God. It is a picture of privilege, having God as our Father. We are his children and we can have a close, intimate relationship as a child to his or her father. We are not separated from God, but we are in the family of God.

God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. We must be the same. We need to be merciful, just as our heavenly Father is merciful. Think about the good that God has done for us while we were enemies and sinful. We need to do good and be merciful to our enemies because of what God did for us.

The World's Favorite Verse
Luke 6:37-49

In today's lesson we will look at the world's favorite verse. However, once we properly understand what Jesus is teaching, we will find that it does not mean what many think this verse means.

Judging Others (6:37-38)

In the last lesson, Jesus left us with a very important principle: do to others what you want done to you. Jesus said that this disciple love their enemies. Jesus was not talking about feeling, but making a conscious decision to act in the best interests of all others, even our enemies. He commands us to do good, give, give above and beyond, and do not expect any repayment. As we come to verse 37 of Luke 6, Jesus is still preaching to his disciples. Jesus is going to adjust this principle so that we will grasp more deeply how we are to act toward our enemies.

When Jesus says, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged," Jesus is not saying that we must not judge people so that people do not judge us. Jesus is not teaching some sort of relativism that we just let people believe what they want to believe so that no one is judging each other. Jesus is talking about God judging others. Do not judge others and you will not be judged by God. Do not condemn others and you will not be condemned by God. Forgive others and you will be forgiven by God.

Previously, Jesus taught to do to others as you want them to do to you. Now Jesus teaches this principle: **Do to others what you want God to do to you.** Treat others, not only how you want them to treat you, but also how you want God to treat you. Jesus is not teaching that we can avoid the day of final judgment if we somehow be sure not to judge other people. No one can avoid the day of judgment. All must stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

The point is to be careful how you judge. Do not judge according to human standards. Perhaps more accurately and more contextually to the point of verse 36, do not judge mercilessly. Do you want God to judge you without mercy? Do you want God to judge you without compassion? God will apply the same standards of judgment to us that we apply to others. If we are quick to condemn others, then God will be quick to condemn us. If we are unwilling to forgive others offenses, then God will be unwilling to forgive our sins. If we are unwilling to give, then God will be unwilling to give to us. If we do not give generously, above and beyond, then God will not give generously, above and beyond, to us.

Verse 38 illustrates this point. Have you ever opened a bag of chips and thought you were getting ripped off? Or have you ever opened a box of food or candy and it was not full? You feel like you did not get all that you paid for. We want a full box. We do not want to purchase a bag of air. We want it full to the brim. This is the idea behind "a good measure." A good measure was one where the grains were put in and pressed down and shaken so that there is no extra space. The measure was good and full. Then the grain would be poured into a cone above the measure, running over. The cup will simply not hold any more because it is full of grain. Now notice the teaching: "For the measure you give will be the measure you get back." Give a good measure to others, and God will give a good measure to you. Treat others how you want God to treat you.

Call To Righteousness (6:39-42)

Jesus tells a very short parable. A blind person cannot lead a blind person without both of them ending up dead. The idea is very simple: be careful who you follow. This seems to be directed at his disciples as a warning about following the Pharisees. They are spiritually blind. Jesus called the Pharisees blind repeatedly. They have the word of God, but do not possess the truth. They do not properly understand the scriptures and are laying a path to God that is false. They claimed to have the truth, but

they didn't. They take texts and twist them and abuse them so that there is error and not what God intended for that scripture to mean.

Tack verse 40 on to this thought. Choose the right teacher. Why do we need to choose the right teacher? Jesus says the reason is that everyone who is fully trained will become like his teacher. That is why his disciples do not need to follow the Pharisees. Watch out for them. They are blind themselves and if you follow them you will both go off the path of God and into a pit. So choose the right teacher.

Who we choose to teach us is very important. We do not want men who will teach on topics that make us feel good about ourselves. We do not want teachers who do not respect the authority of God's word, but twist the scriptures to mean things that do not fit God's character or teachings. We want to hear the word of God.

I also think Jesus is being very subtle here since he is speaking to his disciples. Jesus is their teacher. Disciples should look like the teacher. You can follow men or you can follow Jesus. This is what our series of teachings on the gospel of Luke is all about. We want to know who Jesus is and what he taught so that we can be his disciples. We are not disciples of people. We are not disciples of history. We are not disciples of what the church of Christ always taught or what any church taught. We are not disciples of the reformers. We are not disciples of historical figures in the church. We are disciples of Jesus. We follow no one else.

Now look at verses 41-42. This is a humorous illustration. We have two people. One has a speck of sawdust or wood. All of us have had that moment where something got into our eyes, caused us pain, and uncontrollable blinking. The other person has a builder's beam in his eye. Let's observe the points Jesus makes.

(1) Why do you see specks in others' eyes but do not notice the builder's beam in our own? We do not realize that we are blinded by our own flaws, mistakes, errors, and sins. We easily see and point out the flaws in others, but cannot see that we have the beam. Unfortunately, we seem to think that it is the other person who has the beam in his eye while we, if we have anything, only have a speck in our eye. Check yourself first. You may not see as clearly as you think you can. This continues the theme of Jesus' sermon: do to others as you would have them to do you.

(2) Remove your own speck first, otherwise you are a hypocrite. This is the first time that Jesus has used the word, "hypocrite." Don't start trying to help other people until you are working on your own flaws. Jesus is not teaching that we cannot correct others until we get everything in our life corrected. We would never be able to help or correct anyone if this was what Jesus was teaching. Rather, Jesus is maintaining the theme of his sermon. When I see my own beams in my eyes and understand the difficulty of removing them, I will be more compassionate and merciful to others when trying to help them. When I see my own errors, I will be more forgiving. I will judge as I would want God to judge me because I understand that I am just as much of a sinner as the next person. I will grasp that I am no better than you and you are no better than me in our problems of fighting sin. Check yourself and don't forget your own beams when you go to help others with their shortcomings.

Call To Fruit (6:43-49)

Jesus concludes his sermon to the crowds with a call for fruitful lives. Jesus illustrates his final point with a story about trees. Good trees do not bear bad fruit and bad trees do not bear good fruit. Trees are known by the fruit they produce. Figs don't come from thorns and grapes are not picked from bramble bushes. We know if we are disciples based on the fruit we bear. Your actions and your tongue reveal the abundance of the heart. We need to dig into this important teaching.

How many times have we tried to change our external behavior but have failed in our effort? Perhaps you are trying to stop drinking or trying to stop having outbursts of anger. Perhaps we have some sort of

addiction or vices that we cannot overcome. We stop for a short time, but then we fall back into it. Perhaps we have a sharp tongue. Maybe we speak profanities and take the Lord's name in vain. Perhaps we are trying to stop internet pornography. Or we are trying to stop sexual immorality and promiscuity. I want us to look at what Jesus said: Bad fruit does not come from good trees. Bad fruit comes from bad trees. Good fruit only comes from good trees. What Jesus is telling us that the problem is with our hearts. The reason we are not successful in bearing good fruit is that we have a serious heart condition. The only way to bear good fruit is to change the heart. The only way to overcome these addictions, vices, and sins that we struggle with is to change the heart. We cannot cultivate good fruit from a bad tree. We cannot understand why we cannot change or why we can't stop evil habits, addictions, and sins. Jesus has the answer. Your heart needs regeneration. Your heart is the problem which is leading to these sins. Stop only attacking the symptoms and address the heart. Stop trying to change the fruit without changing the heart. The fruit will not change until the heart changes. Figs are not going to come from thorns. Grapes are not going to come from a bramble bush. We have bramble bushes for hearts. Dried, parched hearts without any love for God. Discipleship is not about keeping rules. Discipleship is loving the Teacher and trying to be like the Teacher. Until I have a heart that loves Jesus because of what he has done for me, we will never bear the fruit of discipleship.

In verse 46 reveals that heart should lead us to obedience. What we do reveals who we are. We cannot say, "Lord, Lord," and not do what Jesus says. The person who comes to Jesus, hears his words, and acts on them is like a man who builds a house on a rock foundation. When the floods rose and the river burst against the house, the house could not be shaken because it was built well. People who listen and do what Jesus says and has a heart for him are going to have strong faith to endure the difficulties of being a disciple. However, those who listen but do not do what Jesus says are not doing to have faith to endure. They are like those who build a house on ground without a foundation. Without Jesus as your foundation, the flood waters will rise and the house will be destroyed. You will lose everything. Your faith will be lost. Your hope will be lost. Jesus must be your life foundation.

Concluding Thoughts:

1. Do to others as you want God to do to you
2. Be careful who you follow and imitate. Jesus is the ultimate guide.
3. Before correcting others, correct yourself and see your own deficiencies.
4. Fruit reveals the tree. Look at your tongue and your actions to know the condition of your heart.
5. Listen and do what Jesus says to endure life's difficulties.

Commendable Faith (7:1-10)

Jesus enters the town of Capernaum. Capernaum becomes Jesus' base of operations when he is teaching in Galilee. In Capernaum there was a centurion who had a servant who was sick and about to die. The centurion has heard about Jesus and he sends the elders of the Jews in Capernaum to Jesus asking for Jesus to come and heal his servant. What is interesting as we begin the story is how the elders of the Jews present this centurion's request to Jesus. The elders come to Jesus and plead with him earnestly saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue."

This is an amazing scene. The Romans did not have much regard for the Jews and their nation. This centurion is an army man in command of his troops in a foreign nation. The Jews did not have much regard for the Romans either. Most of the Jews hated the Roman occupation and were looking forward to the overthrow of the empire. Even more amazing is what this centurion has done for the Jews in Capernaum. The elders say that this centurion loves the Jewish nation and even built their synagogue. Unlike most Romans, this Roman centurion is kind to the Jews. Further, he is generous to the Jewish people to be willing to build their synagogue. Think about how beloved this centurion was for the Jews to go to Jesus on the behalf of a Roman. It is because of this generosity that these Jewish leaders go to Jesus on behalf of this centurion.

Worthiness. The approach the Jewish leaders of Capernaum take is fascinating as well. They approach Jesus with the "worthiness" card. This centurion is worthy of your time. This centurion is worthy of Jesus to go to his house and help him. To the Jewish leaders this centurion is worthy. It is evident that these Jewish leaders had no idea who they were talking to. In no way can you go before the Lord and suggest that a person is worthy of his time or effort. Yet many have the same attitude toward the Lord. What do you think God owes you? Many think that God owes them good health. Many think God owes them a certain level of prosperity. Many think God owes them a certain standard of comfort. We are unwise to ask God for what we deserve. We are foolish to demand God to give us what is owed to us. According to the apostle Paul in Romans 6:23, the wages that we deserve to receive is death. We deserve eternal separation from God. God owes us eternal punishment for our sins. Everything else that we receive is mercy and grace.

We need to transfer this thought to how we treat other people. I am disturbed to hear so many speak in a way that other people owe us something. I hear Christians speak that way. People do not owe you respect. People do not owe you the attention you want. People do not owe you anything. Stop walking through life acting like people should pay attention to you or give you what you want.

Unworthiness. Jesus goes with the Jewish leaders of Capernaum toward the centurion's house. When Jesus was not far from the house, the centurion sent his friends to Jesus to tell him an important message. "Lord do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof." The centurion understand who he is talking to. The Jewish leaders have made their case to Jesus that this centurion is worthy of Jesus. The first thing the centurion does is send his friends to Jesus to tell him that he is by no means worthy. The centurion recognized his unworthiness even though he was an important person. He understands that he is not worthy for Jesus to enter his own house. This shows a great respect for Jesus and a great understanding of who he is in relation to who Jesus is. In the gospels we will read about many who will have Jesus into their houses. Here is a centurion and he gets it. "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof." The shocking generosity of the centurion caused the Jewish

leaders to declare him to be a good person. Compared to other people, the centurion seems worthy. But compared to Jesus, the centurion is unworthy and sinful.

Further, out of his respect the centurion says that he did not want to presume to come to Jesus. The centurion sending his friends to Jesus was out of great respect for Jesus. The centurion did not even feel worthy to be in direct contact with Jesus. We will not understand our standing (or lack thereof) before God until we understand this truth. We are not worthy. We are the needy sinners who do not even deserve the grace of God. Jesus is not in need. We are in need. We must never forget our deep sinfulness that makes us unworthy of anything from the Lord.

Authority. Since the centurion is unworthy, he requests Jesus to “say the word, and let my servant be healed.” The centurion sends a message that Jesus does not have to come into his house. Just say the word and my servant will be healed. The explanation the centurion has for this faith is also staggering. The centurion understands authority. He is in a position of authority. When he says go, he goes and he says come to another and he comes. Therefore, Jesus being in a great position of authority has the power to simply say the word and healing will occur.

This does not happen too often, but Jesus is amazed at the faith of the centurion. Jesus exclaims that the Jews do not have this kind of faith. Here is this Gentile, a Roman centurion, who has tremendous faith and understands the authority that Jesus possesses. Is Jesus amazed by your faith? Is our faith something that would catch our Lord’s attention? Do we have the kind of faith that recognizes that we do not need Jesus’ physical presence in this room to answer our requests? Our Lord can heal from heaven. Our Lord has the power to do anything that we ask by his powerful word. It was through his powerful word that all of creation came into being.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20–21 NKJV)

The centurion recognizes the power of Jesus’ word. This is a great miracle and a great display of Jesus’ power. Jesus is not even there and the servant is healed. Jesus never comes to the house. Jesus never enters the house. Jesus never sees the servant. Jesus never touches the servant. According to the Matthew account, Jesus simply says the word and it happens. The servant is healed.

Resurrection (7:11-17)

After these events in Capernaum Jesus went to a little town called Nain. His disciples and a great crowd followed him there. As Jesus approaches the gates to the city with a great crowd following him he comes across a funeral procession. A man has died and he was being carried out on a bier. Do not visualize a casket. A bier was a flat open stretcher that was carried on the shoulders. The body would have been covered with something like a sheet. The mother of this man is in the procession. He was an only son and worse, the mother was also a widow. This is a devastating event on two counts. First, to watch your children die is a terrible event that is unnatural. Children should bury their parents, not parents bury their children. Second, her financial livelihood was lost. She was a widow. Her only son would have taken care of her. Her only son is now dead and her future is bleak. The body is being carried outside the city walls for burial. Notice that we two great crowds colliding at this moment. Jesus and his disciples have a great crowd following him. A considerable crowd is with the widow following the body of her dead son.

Compassion. When Jesus saw her, he had compassion on her. As far as we know she is a complete stranger. We need to stop here and think about this great truth. Jesus has compassion for his people. Jesus cares about us. Jesus cares about the things that are going on in our lives. Jesus could have easily passed this funeral procession by. He could have used this to teach the woman that it is just physical

death. Be concerned about your spiritual life and fear spiritual death. He could have shown no concern for this woman because he had more important things to do and teach. We must be struck by the fact that Jesus is moved with compassion, stops the funeral, and performs a miracle. Jesus cares about his people. Jesus cares about you. He cares about your cares. He cares about your troubles. It is great to serve God who understands our suffering and cares about our suffering.

Jesus said to her, "Do not weep." At the moment that must have sounded like the most insensitive thing to say. Can you imagine on the day your child died a person coming up to you and telling you not to cry? I can only imagine the likely incredulous look that would have begun to form on her face. "Don't cry? You must be kidding. This is the most appropriate time to cry." We are told that Jesus was moved with compassion. Jesus is about to do something and that is why he tells her not to cry, though she does not know that yet. This is simply an act from compassion. There is nothing about faith in this story. Jesus is simply going to show his power and authority.

Jesus goes up and touches the bier. The men who were carrying the body stand still as Jesus touches the stretcher. Jesus says, "Young man, I say to you, arise." The dead man sat up and began to speak. Can you imagine what that looked like? As the man sat up, the sheet would have moved up. He takes down the sheet and get down from the stretcher and Jesus presents him to his mother. What power is on display again! At the voice of Jesus even the dead come to life. Jesus' words penetrate even through wall of death. Jesus did not just speak to the body. The body is lifeless on the stretcher. Jesus is speaking to the person, wherever he was in the realm of the dead (Hades) and calling him back to this world. Jesus simply says the word and life is brought back into the dead. One wonders if Jesus had simply said arise if all the dead would have risen. Jesus directs his words very carefully. "Young man, I say to you, arise." The crowd understands that Jesus is no ordinary person. Fear seize them all and they all glorify God. They were saying that a great prophet was among them. Certainly Jesus is a great prophet like Elijah who also resurrected a dead son (1 Kings 17:23). Verse 15 mirrors the language of Elijah's miracle in giving the son back to the mother. The crowds understands that Jesus is a great prophet. The crowds also understands that God has visited his people. Clearly, Jesus has been sent from God for them.

Life Lesson

Do we appreciate and accept the authority of Jesus like the centurion? I want to zero in on verse 8 again for a moment. Jesus accepts the centurion's understanding of his authority. If Jesus say go, we are to go. If Jesus say come, then we are to come. If Jesus says to do this, then we do it. This is a pretty simple idea. Jesus is in charge. Yet how often we are not doing what Jesus has told us to do. How often we try to circumvent the clear commands of our Lord. What is it in your life that you are not allowing Jesus to rule over? The authority that Jesus exerts is not partial. We cannot submit only some of our lives to Jesus. So often we think we are in submission to Jesus but we are withholding parts of our lives from his rule believing that we are in submission and obedience to Christ. True followers of Jesus go when Jesus says go and does what Jesus says to do. What in your life are you not doing that Jesus has said to do?

Many of you may think you are a Christian but you have not submitted to baptism. The scriptures teach that this is how we make our appeal to God for the forgiveness of sins (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism is how we join our lives with Jesus and enter a relationship with him (Romans 6:1-4). Many of you may think you are a Christian but you are not living with Christ as your priority. You do what you want. You think you are a Christian because you do not do bad things like those you see on television. But that is not the definition of a Christian. The faith that Jesus accepts is that which obeys all the Christ commands, not just the commands we agree with. Maybe you think you are a Christian because you go to church. We

are very glad you are here. Please know that Jesus has called you to follow him, not to simply to come to church. We are here and would be happy to show you God's plan for your life and what Jesus asks of those who seek him.

The Parable of the Brats
Luke 7:18-35

There are times in life when things simply do not go according to plan. Our expectations for life have been shattered. A life filled with hopes and dreams are often shattered. The spouse, two or three children, and the white picket fence around the house become elusive. We are broken under the weight of sin. The family is torn apart. Your spouse cheats on you. You go through a divorce. Your children suffer from disease or death. Your body breaks down. Life has not gone according to your visualization of how life would go. John the Baptizer experienced a similar situation at this point in his life, which is recorded in Luke 7. The second half of Luke 7 centers on the man that was introduced to us earlier in this gospel, John the Baptizer. John is in prison because he preached to Herod that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife.

John's Question (7:18-23)

John sends two of his disciples to Jesus with an important question. "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" John wants to know if Jesus is the one who is the Messiah. We need to be amazed for a moment that John asked this question. John knew he was the forerunner to Jesus. This was told to him from the day of his miraculous birth. John knew he was the voice in the wilderness to prepare for the coming of the Lord (Luke 3:4-6) John went about preaching, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). John was the one who baptized Jesus when the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. A voice from heaven stated, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). John knew these things. He heard and saw these things. However, now John is in prison. Things do not seem to be going according to plan. John is supposed to be preparing the way for Jesus, not sitting in prison for preaching the good news. So John sends two of his disciples with an important question while John sits in prison. Are you the one or are we looking for another?

Jesus' response to John's question is awesome. Verse 21 tells us that during the time of this question Jesus is healing many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits. He is also healing the blind and giving them sight. Jesus has a message for John. I think it is important to notice the gentleness in Jesus' answer. Jesus does not chastise John for asking this. Jesus gives John the encouragement he needs. Go tell John that the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them. Go tell John what you have seen me do. Jesus did not do this display as some sort of power show to prove himself to John. The miracles that Jesus performs are the fulfillment of messianic prophecies.

And when he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind and unplug the ears of the deaf. The lame will leap like a deer, and those who cannot speak will sing for joy! Springs will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams will water the wasteland. (Isaiah 35:5-6 NLT)

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. (Isaiah 61:1 NLT)

Jesus' answer is that he is fulfilling the promises concerning the Messiah. His answer by his miracles is, "Yes, I am the one who was to come. I am the Messiah." The conclusion of Jesus' message is just as important. "And blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (7:23). Jesus' words are a subtle warning for John and for all others who learn about Jesus. Do not be tripped up by the way Jesus carried out his mission. The style of Jesus' messianic mission did not match most forms of Jewish eschatological expectation. Many had the wrong expectations about what Jesus would do. Many thought the Messiah

would be the overthrower of Rome. Many thought it would be a time of economic prosperity when the Messiah came. Jesus teaches a very important lesson. **Do not have the wrong expectations about Jesus and what he will do.** Trust that he is the Christ even though he did not meet the expectations of the people.

LESSON: We have many of the same issues with Jesus today. Many discredit that there is a God because if there was a God, then why is there war? Why do innocent children suffer? Why doesn't God intervene against evil? How can there be so much evil in the world? Others have different expectations of Jesus. If we follow Jesus, then our suffering will heal. We will have more wealth. We will not have problems if we follow Jesus. We will have good health. We place all kinds of expectations on Jesus.

Who are we to think that we know how God should act? How do we know what is best for the universe? Why do we think that we have more knowledge and wisdom than God so that we can question him and suggest he does not exist because he does not do things the way I think they should be done? Even John seems to have certain expectations of Jesus. Jesus makes the point: he is the Lord and Messiah but he does not do things according to our plans or ways. What false expectations do we have? Do we think we should be married or should be single? Do you think God must give you kids? Do they have to be healthy? Do you have to have as many or as few as you want? Do you have to be healthy? Do you have to never be seriously sick? We have all of these expectations on God that cause us to slip when our expectations are not met.

Jesus' View of John (7:24-30)

Once Jesus sends John's messengers back to John, Jesus begins preaching to the crowds about John. Jesus asks what the people expected to see when they went into the wilderness to see John. Do you think you are going to find a push over living in the wilderness preaching? Did you think you were going to find a luxurious, laid back preacher living in the wilderness? He ate locusts with wild honey. What kind of person did you think you would find? The point is that they knew there was a prophet living out there. They knew that John was a prophet from God. They knew John was great. That is why they went out to the wilderness to see him.

Then Jesus intensifies his point. Yes, John was a prophet. But he was greater than a prophet. He was the prophesied forerunner to the Messiah. John is the one the prophet Malachi declared would come to prepare the way for the Lord. Not only was John a great prophet, he was the greatest person ever born of woman. Jesus simply said that besides himself, John is the greatest person to ever walk the earth. No one was greater than John. These are amazing words. Abraham was considered the greatest as the father of the nation. David was considered great as the king over Israel who was the man after God's own heart. Moses was great who led the people to deliverance from Egyptian slavery. Elijah was the great prophet who performed great miracles. Jesus says that John was greater than all of these people.

Carefully consider what Jesus says in verse 28. **"Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."** John was the greatest person to ever walk the earth besides Jesus. But if you are in God's kingdom then you are greater than John. Do you understand how great it is to be in a relationship with Jesus and belonging to his kingdom! Your position in Christ is so privileged and so great that your relationship with God is as precious as the greatest prophets of God.

When the crowd heard these words, they glorified God declaring him just. The people are acknowledging that God's way is right. They are accepting that God's call for repentance was correct. They needed to repent. However, the Pharisees and the lawyers continued to reject the purpose of God for them. Notice they were rejecting God's purpose by refusing to be baptized by John for repentance. Some things never change. Many today are resisting God's purpose. People today refuse to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. They are rejecting God's plan for their lives. They stubbornly resist and refuse

to believe that they are in sin and need to turn from their sins and receive salvation. In the final section of this chapter Jesus is going to pull all of this together.

Rebuking The People (7:31-35)

Jesus now tells a parable to explain the condition of these people. He says they are like children, but not in a good way. They are like children who call to one another, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep." Jesus calls the people immature, complaining children. Notice the parable is of complaining kids who cannot get the other kids to do what they want. I am quite experienced with this problem with my own children and their friends. A child cries and complains because the others won't do what he or she wants them to do. We played the flute but you didn't dance. You did not do what we wanted. We sang a dirge and you didn't weep. You did not play by our rules and fit our expectations.

Jesus uses this parable to describe the people's criticisms of John and himself. The people knew that John was a prophet from God. Since John did not come eating bread or drinking wine the people declared he had a demon and rejected him. Jesus came eating bread and drinking wine but the people rejected him also, calling him a drunkard and a glutton. It did not matter how the messenger came, they rejected the messenger and the message. Rather than listening to God's messengers, they are telling the messengers what to do. They want Jesus and John to play by their rules. Here is what we want John to be. If Jesus is the Messiah then this is what we want him to do.

Are we complaining or following? Do we dictate to God our terms of service or do we submit to Christ's terms? Too often we want God to follow our rules. We will obey if God does what we want him to do. We will come to worship when we want. We will serve when it is convenient for us. God will accept what I want to give him. When we think like this we are just like these people that Jesus was addressing. God does not submit to us. We submit to him.

Finally, look at the other criticism of Jesus. Not only did he eat bread and drink wine, they criticized him for being a friend of tax collectors and sinners. What a complaint! He is friends with the sinners of this world. He did not spend his time with the religious. He spent his time with the common people of the day, teaching them about the ways of God. We must be like our master and be friends with sinners to have the opportunity to present the gospel. We cannot teach at a distance. Signs and banners will not be enough. Websites will not be sufficient. We must get to know people, know their circumstances, and show them Jesus in that relationship.

Life Lessons

1. It is great to belong to Christ's kingdom
2. What do you expect from Jesus?
3. Are we dictating our terms of service or submitting to Christ's terms?
4. A friend of sinners. Reach out and teach.

The Event (7:36-40)

Luke presents us a great story in the life of Jesus. One of the Pharisees invites Jesus to come to his house and eat with him. The Pharisees were a religious sect within Judaism in the first century. They demanded strict adherence to the Law of Moses by their oral interpretations of the Law. Jesus and the Pharisees clashed on many occasions over their interpretations and traditions concerning Moses' Law. Therefore, the invitation by this Pharisee to eat in his home should be met with some skepticism. We will repeatedly read about the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus in an effort to discredit his teaching and stop the crowds from following him. As we listen to the story we must ask ourselves if the Pharisee, whose name we will learn is Simon, is trying to learn the truth about Jesus or is he trying to find a reason not to follow Jesus. The other background we need for the story is the way people ate at the table. People did not eat at tables like we eat. Their tables were very low to the ground and the people laid on low couches. People would eat by laying on their side, head propped up in hand, feet tucked behind, leaving the right hand free to grab the food for eating. It was not unusual when having a special guest over to one's house to eat that there would be an open door policy. Neighbors in the town could come and listen to the dinner conversation.

In the midst of this meal, a woman of the city, a sinner, learns that Jesus is at the Pharisee's house. This woman is not just a sinner, but is a notorious sinner. Luke records her to be a sinner in verse 37. The Pharisee notes that she is a sinner in verse 39, and Jesus knew she was a sinner from verse 48. The point is that this woman is not some mild sinner. Everyone knows she is a sinner. It has led many to believe that she is a very sexually immoral person such that everyone knows of her sexual escapades. Though the text does not tell us this point, it seems likely that this is why she is known for her sins.

What she does is completely out of the ordinary. She is a notorious sinner and would not have been welcome in Simon's house. However, when she learns that Jesus is eating at Simon's house she brings an alabaster flask of perfume. She enters Simon's house and stands behind Jesus at his feet. She is crying. But she is not just crying. She is not just shedding a tear or two. She is not misty eyed. She is bawling because she is wetting Jesus' feet with her tears. Imagine how much crying it would take to wet the feet of someone you were standing behind. She then stoops down and wipes Jesus' feet with her hair, kisses his feet, and anoints his feet with the perfume. This is an amazing act of love and an amazing act of humility. Ladies, can you imagine wiping your hair on the dirty feet of another? It is probably bad enough to think about doing this act today: taking off the shoes of a person and wiping those dirty feet with your hair. In those days people walked in sandals and the paths were dirt and mud. These are going to be very dirty feet. The woman does not care. It is not that she does not care about dirty feet. Something else has happened that moves her to find Jesus and do this act. We will learn what has happened shortly.

Before we can focus on what the woman is doing, the story turns to Simon the Pharisee. Rather than be emotionally moved by this woman and her love and gratefulness, he is turned off. He has distain for everything he sees. Simon does not care about this woman. He is not moved by the love this woman is showing Jesus. This is a notorious sinner, a despicably immoral woman. Listen to what he says to himself. "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is sinner." To Simon this act completely discredits Jesus. Now he knows who Jesus is and he is certainly not sent from God. If Jesus were a prophet sent from God, he would not let this happen. He would know who this woman was and what kind of woman she was. Little does Simon know that Jesus does know who this woman is and sort of woman she is. Simon also does not know that Jesus is God

and knows the thoughts of people. Knowing what is going on in Simon's mind, Jesus decides to tell Simon a parable.

Application: Have we lost our emotional response to Jesus? When is the last time that we were moved by our sins like this sinful woman? When is the last time the word of God cut us to the heart so deeply that we had an emotional response like this woman? When is the last time we let sin crush our soul? Do we mourn over our sins? Does the word of God stir our souls? When the scripture was read today, were you moved by the story or was the story boring and mundane? This meal that Jesus has attended contrasts the two attitudes we can have toward Jesus. The woman is expressive in her love for Jesus. The Pharisee is not moved at all. It is great for us to be emotional. We should never manipulate our emotions. We should not falsely generate joy or sadness about God. But neither should we conceal the joy we have in worship. We should not conceal our grief when the word of God cuts on our hearts. May we never get to a point that we are stoic toward Jesus and his teachings. We must not be stoic in worship. We should not fear saying Amen to appropriate points in the message. We should not fear joy or sadness to appropriate points in the Lord's Supper, the weekly message, the reading of the scriptures, or prayer. Simon is put off by this woman but Jesus relishes the emotions that are coming from her heart of love and gratitude.

The Parable (7:41-50)

Jesus tells a parable about a moneylender who had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii and another owed 50 denarii. A denarius was a day's wage. Therefore, one person had about a two month debt and the other had about a 21 month debt. What is very important to the story is that neither person can repay the debt. Though one person has a significantly greater debt, we must recognize that neither can repay. Out of the graciousness of the moneylender, he cancels the debt. Neither can repay and both are forgiven the debt. Jesus then drops an important question: who will love him more? Both are forgiven and neither could repay but who will love the moneylender more. The answer is the one who has been forgiven more. The one with the greater debt will show the greater love.

Jesus is going to apply the parable to Simon and the woman. Jesus says, "Do you see this woman?" Simon's internal response was probably something like, "Of course I am seeing this woman. That is the problem! You are not doing something about this woman touching you!" Jesus continues by describing how Simon had refused to give Jesus the customary greetings and hospitality of the day. At the beginning of this message we pointed out that we need to consider if Simon is actually seeking Jesus like Nicodemus, or if he is looking for a reason to discredit Jesus. The lack of hospitality confirms that Simon was not truly wanting to learn more about Jesus. He wanted a reason not to follow Jesus. Simon did nothing that was the custom of the day for a person to come into one's house. He did not give water for Jesus to wash his own feet. The woman has wet Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Simon did not give a custom kiss on the cheek when Jesus entered. The woman has not stopped kissing Jesus' feet. Simon did not offer any oil for Jesus to refresh his head. The woman anointed Jesus' feet with perfume.

Verse 47 holds the key point. **Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that's why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little." (Luke 7:47 HCSB)** I changed translations to help show the point Jesus is making. The more literal translations can be misleading if we read the sentence wrong. Jesus is not saying that the woman's sins were forgiven because she loved much. That is not the point of the parable. The point is that she loved much because her many sins were forgiven. This is also the point of the parable.

Application: Luke is showing us two responses to Jesus based on two different attitudes about sin and grace. Why did the woman act the way she did? Why did she show so much courage to go into the

house of a Pharisee, who would have no compassion for her, and go to Jesus? Why was her emotional response so great? She grasped the gravity and the multitude of her sins. She understood her sinful condition. She knew she was the one with the 21 month debt. She was the debtor with 500 days wages against her. That is why she is emotional. That is why she must find Jesus. That is why she is overflowing with tears. That is why she pours out a fragrant perfume on his feet. Why didn't Simon act this way? He did not see his need for Jesus. He did not see himself as a great debtor.

We learn an important principle from this event. Our awareness of our spiritual condition is tied to our actions. Our affection is fueled by our faith and gratitude. If we love Jesus so little it is only because we have little idea how much we have been forgiven. When we fail to grasp the weight of our sins then we will try to "do the minimum." When we fail to recognize how much we have been forgiven then we do not pour out our lives like fragrant perfume. We become unemotional, disconnected Sunday morning only pew sitters. We do not worship with emotion. We do not want to worship. We do not want to serve. We have the same attitude as Simon toward the lost. We have no interest in saving souls. Failing to understand how great our debt is and how much we have been forgiven causes us to be heartless minimalists, trying to do little for Jesus just as Simon did little for him. Do you love Jesus much or do you love Jesus little? Your actions reveal the answer to this question.

Take Care How You Hear
Luke 8:1-21

In Luke 8:4-8 Jesus tells a parable about farming. He tells of four different soils. This parable is often called The Parable of the Sower. However, the parable is really not about the sower but the soils. It is a parable that many of you know well. In the study of this parable I believe it has been easy to miss the point that Jesus is trying to make.

The first thing we need to observe in this account is that Jesus tells a parable without explanation. It is not as obvious from the Luke and Matthew accounts of this parable, though it can be seen. Mark's account of this parable clearly states that Jesus told this parable to the crowd and did not explain the meaning to them (Mark 4:10). This is why his disciples come to Jesus later and ask him the meaning of the parable (Luke 8:9). Why does Jesus tell parables without explanation? What is going on that Jesus would do something like that? Doesn't it make far more sense to tell the parable and then immediately give the explanation? Notice the reason Jesus gives for telling parables the way he does.

"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'" (Luke 8:10 ESV)

This answer sets up his explanation for the parable of the soils. Jesus says that he tells these parables about the kingdom of God "so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand." Are you confused by this answer? Jesus tells parables so that the people will not see and will not understand. Parables were not told to make his point easier to understand. Parables were told to separate the sincere seeker from the casual hearer. Jesus was not interested in gathering crowds. He was interested in finding true listeners, people seeking the kingdom of God. Jesus is looking for people with particular ears, who are truly listening. He is not trying to amass a following or gather large crowds. He tells parables so that people will come to him and ask him what it means. Jesus is not telling his disciples that they have some sort of miraculous, Spirit-infused knowledge that no one else was given. Why were the secrets of the kingdom of God given to the disciples? It was given to them because they were seeking. It was because they went to Jesus asking the meaning of the parable and Jesus was about to explain the parable because they came looking for the answers.

What do you do with the scriptures that are difficult and hard to understand? Will you do what the crowd does? Will you simply walk away without trying to learn the meaning like the crowd? Too often we are spiritually lazy with the scriptures. We are not interested in learning what the difficult teaching means. We want to oversimplify it, overlook it, or ignore it. We must press into the scriptures. We must try to find out what it means. The disciples of Jesus try to find out what his teaching means. They do not pass it off with a "I don't get it." The parables intended to weed people out who did not want to know the mind of the Lord.

What a difference this is to the common practices of churches today! So many churches think that we need to use all kinds of other means to gather a crowd. The logic is that we must gather a crowd and slip them the gospel while they are here. This is why we see churches having Super Bowl services, figuring that they can artificially generate a crowd and then by teaching for ten minutes they will love the Lord. Jesus did the opposite. Jesus did not try to create crowds. Jesus weeded out the crowds trying to find who was truly interested in seeking after him. This is one reason we do not use any advertising tools other than the gospel and community. Get to know Christ and be part of the family of Christ. We want to find people who are interested in that, not people who are interested in football or bingo. If you want to know the Lord, you are in the right place. If you are looking for entertainment, there is a movie theater at CityPlace. Jesus wanted seekers and he told parables so that "seeing they would not see and hearing

they would not understand." Who will press into God's word and want to learn more? Jesus is looking for you.

The Parable's Explanation (8:11-15)

The parable of the soils is a parable about how the word of God is received. The parable describes how we listen to God's message. There are four ways that God's word is listen to and received, according to this parable. The parable will teach that there is nothing wrong with the sower or the seed. The problem is with our hearing. The parable is asking the audience this question: what heart do you bring to the word of God? How do you listen to the word of God?

The first soil is the parable is described as the path. These hear the word of God but nothing ever happens. Does this sound like you? You are here regularly and you listen to the message each week but nothing changes. You are distracted. You are sleepy. You are bored. You are not listening. You do not care. You should see the things that I see go on out there is the audience. There are times I think about quitting in the middle of a lesson because it looks like you would rather do anything else but truly listen and act. People stare into space, play with the children, play on their phones, read a book they brought, and many other things. Hearing the word of God but nothing is happening. The word is not penetrating the heart. The heart is not receiving God's message. Those with such ears are not who Jesus is looking for as disciples.

The second soil is described as a rock. Jesus says these hear the word of God, receive it with joy, but because they have no root, fall away in times of testing. These hear the word of God, but their heart is shallow and superficial. They become Christians, which is exciting, but they have no root. Thus, they fall away in the time of testing and temptation. This is an all too common response to the word of God. Shallow Christians that never grow deep. They are always shallow with the word of God and shallow in their faith. This person can seem to be a disciple for years because the great moment of testing has not occurred. Sometimes it is only months or even days. I have seen people come to Christ only to never see them again. I have seen people come to Christ, last for a few months, and then give up and go back to their old lives. The problem is that they never develop a deep root in Christ. When we choose not to grow deeper in Christ through reading the word of God, praying, worshiping, and fellowshiping then our faith will not be strong enough to support us during life's difficulties. These are not the hearers who will be Jesus' disciples.

The third soil is full of thorns. These are ones who hear the word, but their faith is choked by the cares, riches, and pleasures of life. Their fruit does not mature. These people hear the word of God but never follow through with what they hear. It is important to realize that Jesus does not say that they are choked out by sins. It is just the distractions of life. Their faith is choked by the cares of the world. The concerns of family, the challenges of work, and any number of things that we give our time to in this world. The enjoyment of riches occupies his time. Always having other things to do. Not that the things you are doing are sinful but you simply do those things rather than worship God, serve God, read God's word, give to the Lord, and the like. These are the ones who are always missing from worship because there is always something else they "have" to do. These are not the followers that Jesus is looking for.

Jesus concludes with the fourth soil being good soil. Notice the characteristics of good soil. This is the one who hears the word, hold fast to the word in an honest and sincere heart, and bears fruit with patience. They hear the message from God's word and they hold on to it. It sinks into their hearts and causes changes. Notice that the changes are not overnight. The fruit comes with patient endurance. Fruit bearing takes work and time before significant results are seen. This is why Jesus told parables. He is trying to find those who have these kinds of ears and hearts. Who has the good, sincere, and honest heart? Jesus is trying to find those people to be his disciple.

Unfortunately, too often we end the message right here. But the story is not done. There is nothing in the next verse to indicate that we have a new setting or a new teaching. You notice from the story that Jesus is continuing to expound on the teaching of listening.

Lamp Under A Jar (8:16-18)

Jesus uses a second parable to emphasize his teaching. When we keep this parable in its context we will see its relevance to how we hear. In fact, notice that Jesus' conclusion to this parable is, "Take care then how you hear." If you have something useful like a lamp, you use it! You have heard the word of the Lord. What are you going to do with it? Many hear the word of God without making any changes. You go to worship services, sit through sermons, but nothing happens. They are as useless as a lamp under a jar.

What are you going to do with what you have received in hearing God's word? Notice verse 18: **"For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."** To put this another way, if you are not seeking and striving for understanding, you will not understand any of it. Jesus' message provides light for those who listen and that light reveals our heart attitudes. When the word of God is proclaimed, what we do with the word shows which soil we are. We immediately learn the condition of our hearts. If you do not seek to understand God's word then you will not understand God's word. When the crowds did not come to learn the meaning of the parable then they were not going to learn the secrets of the kingdom of God. The disciples did because they came asking for understanding. We must not shy away from teaching and preaching the difficult doctrines and texts because God is looking for those who want to learn more about him.

Jesus' Family (8:19-21)

Once again the setting has not changed and the topic has not changed as we come to verse 19. Jesus' mother and brothers come to see Jesus but cannot because the crowd is so massive. Jesus declares who are truly in the family of Christ: those who hear the word of God and do it. This is the same as the good soil in the parable. The message of this text is to take care how we listen. How you listen to God's word shows if you are truly one of Jesus' disciples or not. How you listen shows if you are really in the family of Christ.

There is only one point to this lesson today. As you look at your spiritual life up to today, which soil are you? Have you been listening but not caring and not changing anything? Have you listened and obeyed, but have not grounded yourself in God's word so that times of trial rip you away from God? Have you listened but you are entangled by life's distractions, not following Jesus as you must, putting other things ahead of our Lord? Have you been listening and holding fast to God's word, and the fruit of your faith can be seen by all? Take care how you hear.

In chapter 8, Luke is sharing with us four events of hopelessness and despair in three acts. These events are put together to show us something very important about Jesus. Luke wants to ask and answer the question, "Who is this Jesus?"

Lord Over The Deep (8:22-25)

Jesus gets into a boat with his disciples to cross to the other side of the lake, known as the Sea of Galilee (show map). This journey is a few miles and Jesus falls asleep in the boat. We must not imagine some sort of yacht where Jesus went downstairs and was no longer exposed to the elements. Instead we must think of a long fishing boat able to hold 15 men that is exposed to the elements (see photo). Jesus is not tucked away in the bottom of the boat but is right there with his disciples in the boat. While sailing across the lake a great windstorm came down on the lake. Scientific studies have shown this description to be very accurate. The lake is 700 feet below sea level and the mountains around the lake are approximately 1000 feet above sea level. Because of the terrain of the land around the lake, wind will rush down the mountains and on to the lake causing great storms to occur on the lake. In a matter of moments the calm lake can turn into a dangerous storm. The storm is so severe that the boat is filling with water. The disciples go into a panic. Remember that some of these men are trained fishermen. They know how to handle storms on the lake. They are seasoned sailors and veterans of the dynamics of this lake. However, these professional fishermen are very worried. In fact, they are screaming at Jesus that they are dying. Jesus wakes up and rebukes the wind and the raging waves. Immediately the wind and the waves cease their torrent and there was calm. Luke wants us to observe a couple of things about Jesus from this short story.

(1) First, who is this person, Jesus? Notice that this what the disciples are saying to each other. Think about what just happened. Who, in the midst of a storm on the lake, rebukes the wind and the waves? Who shouts out, "Silence! Be still?" Further, who rebukes the wind and the waves and the wind and the waves listen? This is portrayed as a complete miracle. The storm does not stop in about an hour. Nor does the waves and wind start dying down. Think about this for a moment: waves do not immediately stop just because the wind stops. The waves will keep going for quite awhile once they are churning. Instantly the lake becomes calm and the wind stops. Jesus has complete power and control over creation. Only God has authority over nature. Only God calms the storm. Notice how the psalmist attributes such power to God.

They saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep. 25 For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. 26 They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; 27 they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. 28 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. 29 He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. 30 Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. (Psalm 107:24–30 ESV) This is the first point Luke wants his readers to learn. Jesus has complete control over creation meaning Jesus is God.

The second point comes from Jesus' question to the disciples in the boat. "Where is your faith?" Do you really think that you are going to perish when Jesus is in the boat? The only way the disciples would not have panicked would have been if they understood that Jesus is Lord over creation. They did not believe that Jesus would deliver them from this storm. They did not believe that Jesus was powerful enough to deal with the dire situation they were in. If the disciples understood who Jesus was and truly

had faith in him, they would have known that the creation is not going to kill God. It can't happen. Nor will Jesus allow the creation to drown them in the lake when Jesus said they were going to the other side of the lake. Jesus is Lord over creation.

Lord Over Demons (8:26-39)

Once Jesus and disciples finish crossing the lake, they come across a demon-possessed man. This man is a mess. He is not wearing clothes, living in the cemetery, and had been shackled with chains but repeatedly broke them. When the man sees Jesus, he starts falls down and cries out, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" The demon-possessed man is asking to be left alone. Why are you interfering with me? Leave me alone! The demons recognize who Jesus is. He is the Son of the Most High God. He is divine and he is the one who has come to cast out demons. Therefore, the demons begin to beg Jesus to be cast into the pigs rather than be cast into the abyss. This is important. The demons are asking Jesus for permission. They know they are in subjection to Jesus. Jesus is Lord over the demons. Jesus has authority over the spiritual realm. Jesus must have come in the power of God to be able to cast out demons. Further, the demons acknowledge Jesus as God as they tremble in fear of him.

Notice the two reactions at the end of this event. The people from this region ask Jesus to leave because they were seized with great fear. They see what Jesus had done but do not want to know more about Jesus. Rather, they ask Jesus to leave them. This is a reaction that many have when recognizing the great authority and power Jesus possesses. Please leave so I do not have to think about this. We want to ignore how great Jesus is. We want to rule over our lives and do not want to place our lives in the hand of Jesus. Please go back to the other side and deal with the people over there. How many people refuse to consider the God of the universe and what that means for us! If Jesus is God, then we are his creation. If Jesus is king, then we are his subjects. If Jesus is master, then we are his slaves.

The reaction of the man who had the demons cast out showed an entirely differently response. He begs to go with Jesus. He does not want to send Jesus away. He wants to get into the boat and come with him and his disciples. Jesus tells him to stay in that region and declare how much God has done for him. So went away doing that very thing. He proclaimed throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. Will understanding the authority of Jesus cause you to send him away or cause you to follow him and proclaim him throughout the city?

Lord Over Disease and Death (8:40-56)

Jesus returns across the lake and a crowd is waiting for him when he returns. The ruler of the synagogue is named Jairus and he has an only daughter who is twelve years old and dying. Jairus requests that Jesus come to his house to heal her. As Jesus is going with Jairus, the crowds are pressing in on Jesus. We must imagine a thronging, pressing crowd on Jesus as he moves with great difficulty toward Jairus' house.

As Jesus is going through the crowd there is a woman who has dealt with a discharge of blood for twelve years. Her condition is hopeless as she has spent all of her money on doctors and yet could not be healed. According to the law this continual discharge of blood is causing her to be perpetually unclean (Leviticus 15:25-31). In the pressing of the crowd, she comes up behind Jesus, touches the fringe of his garment, and she was immediately healed. Then Jesus says, "Who was it that touched me?" Everyone denies touching him. Peter is incredulous at this question. "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!" Essentially, "Who touched you? Everyone is touching you!" However, Jesus clarifies that this was not an ordinary touch of the crowd. Jesus says that he was aware that power had gone out from him. This is an amazing statement. Jesus noticed that power went out of him. We cannot

begin to explain this except that Jesus is truly God. This is something crowds understood also. **“And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all” (Luke 6:19 ESV).** At this, the woman comes trembling and falling down before Jesus and declared in the presence of all why she touched him and how she was immediately healed. Jesus declares, “Your faith has made you well; go in peace.” The gospel of Mark tells us that she thought he would be healed if she just touched his clothing. What great faith to recognize that Jesus is Lord over diseases. Jesus is so powerful and carries so much authority that even touching him would bring healing.

In this moment of great glory as this woman has been healed, sad news arrives for Jairus. Someone from Jairus’ house comes and tells him that his daughter is dead. Do not bother the teacher anymore. Imagine the tears he is shedding. Imagine the pain in his heart. Jesus tells Jairus, “Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.” When Jesus comes to the house, he only allows James, John, and Peter to come into the house along with the dead girl’s mother and father. As Jesus is about to enter the house, he tells the mourners to not weep because the girl is only sleeping. However, they all laugh at Jesus because they know that the girl is actually dead. Jesus enters the house, takes the girl’s hand, and says, “Child, arise.” Her spirit returns to her body, she gets up from the bed, and is given something to eat.

Jesus shows authority and power over death. Circumstances and events that are greater than humans are not greater than Jesus. Jesus has power over the weather, the demons, all diseases, and even death. We have control over none of these things. We cannot prevent death coming upon us. All of us are going to die. We cannot heal ourselves of the various diseases, illnesses, and syndromes with which we are afflicted. We cannot even change the weather. Jesus is stronger than all of these things. Jesus is Lord over all. These stories show us the power of Jesus. Jesus is God and he is filled with all the power of God.

Jesus not only has the power, but he has the compassion to act. Jesus has the desire to do. It would be amazing enough to see the great power Jesus is exerting. Even more impressive is that Jesus has the desire to act upon that power. This is perhaps one of the more disappointing things we see in our world today. There are people who have power but do not use that power to help others. We see people have billions of dollars but do not use their wealth to help the sick. Even we have various opportunity to do good and yet often let those opportunities pass us by. This is not true of Jesus. Jesus did not use his power for self-advancement. He used his power to prove he was God while at the same time desiring to help his creation. Not only does Jesus have the power, but he wants to do things for us. We have an accessible God. We have a God who loves us, cares for us, and acts on our behalf.

Notice one other aspect of the power of Jesus. Jesus never used his power to avoid the trials of life. Jesus does not go on the boat with his disciples and keep the storms from overtaking the boat. Jesus could have done that. He does not. Jesus does not prevent the man from being demon-possessed. Jesus does not prevent the woman with the flow of blood from ever being sick with that disease. Jesus does not prevent Jairus’ daughter from dying. Jesus does not cause us to avoid the trials, but delivers us through the trials. Jesus calms the storm. Jesus casts out the demons. Jesus heals the woman. Jesus raises the dead child.

Following Jesus does not mean that he will use his power to keep you from the storms of life. Jesus is Lord over all and will use his power to deliver you through troubles, not to keep you from troubles. The reason why Jesus does this is clear from the story. It is how Jesus searches for faith. Jesus allows the storm on the lake and asks, “Where is your faith?” With the demon-possessed man we see Jesus finding out who will follow him and who will send him away. The woman with the flow of blood was healed because of her faith in Jesus. Jairus had a choice to listen to the messenger who said it was too late and to not trouble Jesus any further or to listen to Jesus who said, “Do not fear; only believe.” Where is your faith? The way we handle the difficulties of life shows our Lord where our faith rests. Jesus has power of

all things. Will you trust him to get you through your difficulties? Will you believe in him when your boat is sinking? Will you serve him even when your child dies? Will you proclaim him when the rest of the region rejects him? Will you approach him and touch him because you know he is the only one who can heal your life?

Proclaiming the Kingdom (9:1-6)

Chapter 9 begins with Jesus gathering the twelve and giving them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. The reason was to send out the twelve apostles to proclaim the kingdom of God. The casting out of demons and curing diseases would validate the apostles' message. Before we can continue we must consider what exactly the twelve were proclaiming. The language sounds fairly simple and it is easy for us to pass over what the apostles were proclaiming. Notice Isaiah's prophecy about the kingdom.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:6-7 ESV)

You may recognize verse 6 which is known to speak of the coming of Jesus. Pay attention to the next verse, a verse that we often do not pay as much attention. There will be no end to the increase of his government and the peace that comes from his rule. He will sit on the throne of David and rule over his kingdom, established and upheld by justice and righteousness. Isaiah is prophesying of a time when the messianic kingdom will arrive, be established, and grow in dominion. The throne of David will be established once more. Notice Daniel's prophecy about the coming kingdom.

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14 ESV)

A few verses later the prophecy of Daniel also states about this messianic kingdom:

Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him. (Daniel 7:27 NIV)

We need to see what is being proclaimed. The great kingdom of the Messiah has arrived with all power and authority to rule over the nations of the earth and restore humanity back to God. The apostles wielding power over demons and diseases would show the people that the power of this kingdom has arrived in Jesus. Jesus is the king.

Notice how Jesus sends his twelve disciples to proclaim this message of the kingdom. Jesus instructs his disciples to take nothing for this preaching journey. They are not to pack a bag, any food, a change of clothes, or any money. Can you imagine being told to go out like this? We are going to walk around West Palm Beach for a week preaching the gospel. Do not pack a bag. Do not bring a change of clothes. Do not bring any food. Do not bring any money. Do you have the faith for this work? Take nothing! Who prepares for a journey like this? Perhaps we would like to think that the disciples are going to be so successful that they will not have to worry about these things. Maybe we would think that everyone is going to accept them into their homes and so they will be fine. However, such a thought is not true. Jesus warns them that they are going to be rejected. Wherever they are not received they were to shake the dust off their feet. This was a symbol that acted as a testimony against the people for their rejection. This was an act done by the Jews when they traveled from foreign lands. When the Jews returned to Israel, they would shake off the uncleanness from their feet to reenter the holy land. Those who rejected

the apostles would be given the serious testimony that they were unclean, unholy, and rejected by God through the symbol of shaking the dust off their feet. There would be unsuccessful days. There would be towns where the twelve would be rejected.

The disciples are required to show their faith. They are going to learn to trust Jesus their Lord at this moment. They will trust God for food, protection, and shelter. We learn about the kind of faith that Jesus demands from his followers. We also learn that evangelism requires engaging people, serving, and preaching to them. We must reach out. We must teach. We must invite. We must share the good news of the kingdom.

Who Is This? (9:7-9)

Herod, the one who killed John the Baptizer, hears about Jesus and all that is happening around him. Some were going around saying that John had been raised from the dead. Herod is perplexed by this because he was the one who had John killed. If you have someone killed and he rises from the dead, it is perplexing. So Herod wants to know who this person is and what this means. This is the same Herod who will want to see Jesus once Jesus is arrested because he wanted to see a show of signs from him (Luke 23:8). The power of the message of the kingdom has even reached the ears of King Herod. Luke presents the readers with another person asking the question, "Who is this Jesus?"

Faith God Will Provide (9:10-17)

When the twelve return they explain to Jesus all they had done. The crowds follow Jesus and he continued to speak about the kingdom of God and cured those who needed healing. As it became late in the day, the disciples advise Jesus to send the crowds away so that they can find lodging and get food because they are in a desolate area. Jesus' response is startling. "You give them something to eat."

I appreciate the response of the disciples because it would have been the response I would have given also. There are five thousand men, which means there could have been as many as 10,000 to 20,000 people total when women and children are included in the counting. We only have five loaves of bread and two fish. These are not bread loaves like we have today. These are like biscuits or small pita bread circles, to relate it to something similar in our day. How can you tell us to feed the crowd? We do not have enough food and we cannot afford to buy enough food for all these people. The gospel of John records that Philip calculates that nine months wages would not be enough to feed this crowd. Yet Jesus said to feed them. Do you think Jesus didn't know that they only had five loaves and two fish? Do you think he did not know that they had no means to provide for the people? I think this is the very point. Jesus wants the twelve to see that they are unable to provide for these people. Unfortunately, none of the disciples realize that they are with God and not a man. No one thinks that Jesus has the power to feed this crowd. No one says, "Lord, you can do it!"

Visualize what this looked like. Jesus tells the disciples to have the crowds sit down in groups of fifty. Jesus takes the loaves and fish and says and blessing. Then he breaks the loaves and gives the loaves to his disciples to give to the crowd. Imagine the disciples receiving the bread, giving it the crowds, going back and getting more bread from Jesus. They keep going back and getting more bread until more than 5000 people have eaten and are filled. Then the disciples go back through the crowds, collect the leftovers, which amounted to twelve baskets of broken pieces. Jesus ends up with more food than he started with and 5000 men, possibly up to 10,000 to 20,000 people, have eaten and are satisfied. The leftovers show that Jesus is greater than Moses, who fed the people manna in the wilderness just enough for each person that day (Exodus 16). Jesus feeds the people bread and there is even more left over. The disciples who were given authority and power over demons and diseases are serving more than 5000 people dinner from Jesus. Jesus does not set up a buffet line to hand the bread to each

person as they come through. Jesus wants his twelve disciples to be servants. Though given authority, it did not negate the fact that they are still to be servants to all.

Conclusion

Your abilities and resources are not enough. Jesus wants to make his disciples clearly aware of this truth. They could not heal diseases or cast out demons by their own power. They could not feed 5000 people with their own resources. God is not limited by our inadequacies. Instead, our limitations display the glory of Jesus. God can do what we cannot do. That is what makes serving our Lord so special. God's will and plan will be accomplished in spite of our shortcomings. There are so many things that we think we cannot do for the Lord because we think we are not good enough. God wants us to recognize our shortcomings and then watch how God can work in our lives in spite of what we cannot do.

Moses is another example of this great truth. Moses said he could not speak and was unfit for the job. God used Moses anyway to show the power of God. God does not want Moses' power on display. God wants his own power on display. You do not need to be a good teacher because God's word will be powerful in the lives of the world through our failings. God made the point like this to Paul. **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** Thus Paul understood this great thought. **"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weakness, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).** If we were perfect, then Christ's power could not be seen. But because we are weak, frail, and inadequate, God uses this to show how great he is. The things that we think make us unqualified to serve the Lord are the things that make us the most qualified to serve the Lord.

Will you trust God to do the tasks commanded? Will we understand that God supplies the things we need to be servants of his? As Peter would later write, **"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3).** The twelve needed to see that truth as they were sent out with nothing extra to provide for them. Trust in God to give you what you need.

The mistake we often make is the same mistakes as the crowds did on the next day. Luke does not record what the crowd did the next day but John does in his gospel.

Jesus answered, "I assure you: You are looking for Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Don't work for the food that perishes but for the food that lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal of approval on Him." (John 6:26-27 HCSB)

The meaning of the miracle is spiritual and eternal, not merely physical and temporal. Don't seek God because you think he will satisfy your bellies today. Seek God because you know he will get you through to eternal life. Bread is life. Jesus gives true life. Will we trust in Jesus to give us that true life? Will we obey him knowing that we are laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven? We must learn to trust Jesus. Today is the day and now is the time to take the first step in trusting him. Seek what truly matters to your soul.

The Cross of Discipleship
Luke 9:18-27

Luke has been spending the last few chapters in his gospel explaining who Jesus is. We are approaching a pivot point in the gospel where Luke begins to shift from explaining who Jesus is to explaining who are followers of Jesus. In our reading today we will notice showing giving us more information about who Jesus is and then describing who can following Jesus. Notice these two messages as we read God's holy word.

Who Is Jesus? (9:18-22)

Luke emphasizes the prayer life of Jesus. In verse 18 Luke subtly points out that Jesus was alone praying. In Luke 6:12 we were told that Jesus went out to a mountain to pray and continued in prayer all night to God. This is another time where Jesus is alone in prayer and his disciples come to him. Jesus asks his disciples two important questions. First, who do the crowds say that I am? Notice again that Luke is probing the answer to the question: Who is Jesus? There were a number of different answers as to who Jesus was. Some people say that Jesus was John the Baptizer. We noticed this in verse 7 where some people were saying that John had been raised from the dead. Others thought that Jesus was Elijah and yet others thought he was some other prophet of old. Luke is drawing out the point that the understanding of the crowds concerning Jesus is incomplete. The crowds do not fully understand who Jesus is.

Luke addresses the second and more important question. Who do you say that I am? It does not matter what everyone else says about Jesus. Who do you say Jesus is? What is your belief in him? This question is just as critical today as it was at this moment when Jesus asked his disciples. Who do people today say Jesus was? Many say that he was a good, moral man who taught good things to the world. Some religions say that Jesus is a prophet of God. Some are even bold enough to say that Jesus was not a real person who lived, though there are many historical evidences outside the scriptures proving there was a person named Jesus who lived in Palestine in the first century doing signs and teaching people. The world has all sorts of thoughts about who Jesus is. The critical question is: Do you know who Jesus is? Jesus asks this question of all his disciples.

Peter answers this question on behalf of all the twelve. Jesus is the Christ of God. Christ is not a last name. Too often Jesus Christ is used as if this was his first and last name. Christ is a title. Christ is the equivalent of Messiah in Hebrew. Christ means "anointed." The disciples understand that Jesus is more than a man and more than a prophet. Jesus is the anointed. This is a picture of kingship. He is the anointed king, anointed by the Father, to rule and bring deliverance, restoration, and salvation. Notice that Luke is not interested in exploring the depths of what this means like Matthew does in his gospel. Rather, Luke is going to deepen the understanding the readers have about Jesus. Notice what Jesus does next.

And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (Luke 9:21–22 ESV)

This is the first time that Luke has directly recorded the coming suffering of Jesus. Jesus wants his disciples to know that his kingship and messiahship are not going to go like they think. Jesus is not going to overthrow Rome the way they think he will. Jesus is not going to rule from Zion like they think he will. Jesus wants to make this point very clear. He is going to suffer, be rejected by the leaders, be killed, and then be raised on the third day. This is important. Jesus knew this would happen. The rejection of Jesus and his kingdom was not a surprise to him. Jesus did not attempt to establish his

kingdom only to find rejection. Jesus is already predicting how things are going to go. It is necessary for him to suffer, be killed, and be raised for him to be the Messiah that we need — a savior who delivers us from our sins. Jesus was not going to walk the path of popularity and glory but of rejection and humiliation. Jesus' road to glory as king and Messiah must go through the cross. The pivot of the book happens here because now Jesus is going to teach that those who follow him must walk the same road.

Following Jesus (9:23-27)

Jesus announces the requirements of following Jesus. To follow Jesus one must deny himself and take up his cross daily. This imagery is absolutely jarring and shocking. It would be similar to saying today, "Deny yourself, sit in the electric chair daily and follow Jesus." The first statement is to deny oneself. To follow Jesus means that we cannot live for ourselves any longer. You may notice that this is how I start most of the invitations I give at the end of my lessons. We cannot no longer live for self, obeying our passions and lust. We must live for Jesus now. Our life must no longer be about what I want to do but what Jesus wants me to do. Denial of self is the opposite message of the world. The world tells us to indulge ourselves, live for self, and to please ourselves. The world says to do what makes you feel good. If you want to follow Jesus, you will not please yourself first. You will ask what pleases Jesus first. Following Jesus means embracing a life of self-denial. In fact, there is no part of the Christian life that does not require self-denial.

Next, we are told to take up the cross. Condemned criminals carried one bar of the cross to the place of their execution. Carrying the cross was a one way journey. The person carrying the cross would not come back down that path. They were going to their death. We are not living for self. We are killing self. The cross intensifies this imagery for us. Jesus' point is clear. If we are still living for self, then we are not his disciple. If we are not Christians, even if we think we are, and we are lost in our sins. Discipleship is difficult and involves suffering and sacrifice. The cost of following Jesus is giving up all of ourselves for him. We will respond to God's will not our own. It is the end of the independent life. Jesus is calling for a deep commitment to follow him.

Unfortunately, we want to follow Jesus with as little inconvenience as possible. We want to follow Jesus as long as he goes where we want to go. Instead of giving up the life we had, we try to find a way to add Jesus to our current life. This is not discipleship and it is not the commitment that Jesus is calling for from his followers. Jesus is not following you. You are not doing what you want and Jesus will follow you wherever you go simply because you have been baptized, pray, or attend worship. You are called to follow him. The call to follow him is a call of full commitment. We are laying ourselves on the altar of obedience. We will go where he leads, regardless of how uncomfortable, how painful, or how hard it is.

To make sure we understand what Jesus is calling for, Jesus digs even deeper. Only if you lose your life for Jesus will you have your life saved from the wrath to come. If you try to keep your current life, doing what you want to do, believing that Jesus is following you, you will lose your life. The reason we need to give our lives completely to Jesus now is because if we do not, we will lose our eternal souls. We try to save our lives in so many ways. We try to save our lives by pursuing careers, working so hard that there is little time for God. We try to save our lives by organizing our lives around entertainment. We do things that we enjoy, getting what we want out of life. We are not willing to make any cost investment in God's kingdom. We are unwilling to open our hearts to show a love for Jesus. We keep to ourselves, with blank stares showing no care for the things of God. We will not make any commitments to God. We will not share the gospel with anyone. We keep to ourselves, never extend ourselves toward other Christians, never engage the community, and never go beyond Sunday attendance. We go to work, we go to school, and take care of our schedules and do our thing. In doing these things, we are saving our lives now. Jesus warns you are going to lose your life the way you are living.

Which life will you decide to lose? Jesus teaches an important truth. You are going to lose one life. You will either lose your life now but gain eternal life in the age to come. Or you will have your life now but will lose eternal life in the age to come. The religious lie of our day is to tell people who are seeking God that you can have all the best of this world now. You can have your best life now. You can fulfill all your desires and wants now. This teaching is directly opposed to what Jesus taught. Jesus said you must lose your life now if you want to follow Jesus and have life in the age to come. We lose our lives in this world when we give ourselves completely to Jesus. We lose our lives when we live for Christ and through Christ live for others and not ourselves. We lose our lives now by putting a priority on sharing the gospel, even if they reject the message and reject us. We lose our lives when we give first to God. If we think that our Lord who died for us is okay with us doing what we want to do occasionally because of convenience or because of schedules, we are sorely mistaken.

What good are you doing if you gain everything this world has to offer and lose your eternal soul? What will have been the point? What does it matter if you get all you want in this life only to be cast into hell? Funerals remind us of this truth. What is going to happen to you when you die? We live so focused on life here that we forget that we will give an account for what we have done. Are we following Jesus the way he demands or are we being lazy with our Lord? You cannot add Jesus to your life and think you are a follower of Jesus. What is the point of living for the things of this world when you know that you are going to die and none of it will matter?

What we have done is shown that we are ashamed of Jesus and his words. We are so ashamed of Jesus that we will not read God's holy word in a public place for fear of what others will think. We are so ashamed that we will not leave cards on a table inviting to come know the Lord. We are so ashamed that we will not ask our friends and acquaintances to study the Bible with us. We are so ashamed that we will not mention to people that our joy and happiness comes from knowing the Lord. Why are we so afraid of saying and showing that we love Jesus? Why are we so ashamed of being Christian? Rather than dedicating ourselves to the Lord and taking up the cross, we try to fit in with the world. Jesus says that whoever is ashamed of him then when he comes in glory he will be ashamed of us. I fear that he is going to be ashamed of all of us if we do not get this cross on our backs and follow Jesus. Stop looking at the cross and pretending to be a Christian. It is time to pick up the cross and follow him completely.

Finally, notice that the cross must be picked up daily. You do not pick up the cross at baptism and then set the cross back down the next day, the next month, the next year, or any time after that. Every day we must wake up and immediately pick up that cross. Every day we need to remind ourselves that the first thing we must do today is put to death ourselves and live for Jesus. Jesus declared that he would suffer, be rejected, and be killed. Then Jesus said if you want to follow him, you must walk down the same path. Deny yourself, pick up that cross every day, and follow him. (We did not get to verse 27. We will examine that verse in our next lesson.)

At the conclusion of speaking to his disciples about what is required to be a follower of Jesus, Jesus explains the time of the coming of the kingdom of God. Verse 27 records this concluding statement.

But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:27 ESV)

What is Jesus referring to? What event is going to happen that he could say that there were some standing there in the first century who would see the kingdom of God come before they died? There have been numerous interpretations for this statement. In lesson we will examine the possibilities and then explore the importance of Jesus' words.

Seeing the Kingdom of God

The full, glorious kingdom at the second coming. Some take the position that Jesus is speaking about the arrival of the full, glorious kingdom and that Jesus was wrong about the nearness of this kingdom. There are a number of reasons to reject this position. Most notable is the fact that any position which suggests Jesus was wrong cannot be accepted. If Jesus was wrong, then Jesus is not God. Therefore he is a liar and we are dead in our sins. Further, Jesus says that only some would standing there would see the kingdom of God. When Christ returns at his second coming and all things are fully restored and subjected under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:20-26), every eye will see him and everyone will bow the knee before Christ (Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10).

The destruction of Jerusalem. Christ described himself as coming in the clouds against the Jewish nation, which was fulfilled in 70 AD (cf. Matthew 24:30; 26:64). However, Luke never makes any connection to the coming of the kingdom to the destruction of Jerusalem event.

The transfiguration. The most popular view taken by writers and scholars is the transfiguration as the event Jesus is referring to. The *ESV Study Bible* reads, "Some standing here refers to Peter, John, and James, who will witness the transfiguration." The *HCSB Study Bible* reads, "This cryptic statement refers to the next event in the book—the transfiguration of Jesus (vv. 28-35). Some standing here indicates Peter, James, and John, who were with Jesus at His transfiguration (v. 28). See the kingdom of God apparently means that the glorious appearance of Jesus (vv. 29,32) was a preview of the coming kingdom." The *MacArthur Study Bible* states, "In all three of the synoptic Gospels, this promise is made immediately prior to the transfiguration (Mark 9:1-8; Luke 9:27-36). Furthermore the word for "kingdom" can be translated 'royal splendor.' Therefore, it seems most natural to interpret this promise as a reference to the transfiguration, which "some" of the disciples—Peter, James, and John— would witness only six days later." This is a small sampling from the many books I own that say that Jesus is referring to the transfiguration.

I am amazed that so many take this position. The gospel writers do not make a connection between seeing the kingdom of God and the transfiguration event. Worse, the writers who accept this position fail to see the absurdity in Jesus' words if their interpretation is correct. Jesus makes this announcement: There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. One week later the transfiguration event occurs (Luke 9:28; cf. Matthew 17:1, Mark 9:2). What a ridiculous statement! I can make a statement of a similar nature. "There are some standing here today who will not taste death until my sermon next week." It is a statement of the obvious. There is nothing prophetic about it. If Jesus is referring to the transfiguration, then Jesus had no reason to say that "some would not taste death." Some commentators at least are willing to admit this as a deficiency in their view.

“Why Jesus said they would not taste death before participating in an event only days away is perplexing. But he may have chosen those words because most people despaired of seeing the glory of the kingdom in their lifetime.” (Walter L. Liefeld, Luke from *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*)

At least he admits that it would be perplexing for Jesus to speak like this about the transfiguration. However, the rest of his explanation falls flat. According to this interpretation, only three people would see the kingdom of God—Peter, James, and John. No one else saw the transfiguration event. So this would not help the people who are despairing that they would miss seeing the glory of the kingdom. If the transfiguration was that glory, then only three people saw it. So what event is Jesus referring to when he makes this declaration? The time frame of Jesus’ words helps us determine what he is talking about. It cannot be too soon because then the declaration about not seeing death is meaningless. However, it cannot be more than a few decades otherwise Jesus’ words would be found untrue. What great event happened in the first century that could be described as the arrival of the kingdom of God? Mark adds one more detail to this event.

And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.” (Mark 9:1 ESV)

Notice that Mark adds the kingdom of God will come with power. It is an event that some would see and it would be an event full of power. At the beginning of Luke’s sequel, the book of Acts, the apostles ask if now was the time for the restoration of the kingdom. The apostles are looking for the arrival of the kingdom. Jesus has been preaching to the apostles for 40 days about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). Jesus answers the apostles’ question that it was not for the apostles to know the exact day or time that the kingdom was going to arrive with power (Acts 1:7). However, Jesus does tell them what to look for to prove the arrival of the kingdom.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8 ESV)

This is Jesus’ answer to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. This would be the event when the kingdom of God would arrive with power. When the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles giving them power, then we would know that the kingdom of God has arrived. In Acts 2 we read about the apostles receiving the Holy Spirit, therefore proving that the kingdom had arrived.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1–4 ESV)

Peter goes on to quote the prophet Joel to prove that these signs were to show the arrival of the kingdom. Follow Peter’s argument from Acts 2:29-35. As you read this section you will notice that Peter is pointing out that these signs prove the arrival of the promised kingdom. In verse 30 Peter notes that God had sworn with an oath that he would place a descendant of David on the throne. To be set on a throne means you have a kingdom and means you are ruling. God set a descendant of David on the throne, implying the arrival of the kingdom. Peter states in verse 31 that it is the resurrection of Christ that was in view. God raised up Jesus and exalted him to the right hand (vs. 32). Therefore, Christ is ruling on the throne of David. David did not ascend and sit on the throne, but Jesus did (vs. 34-35). God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ. Christ is on the throne and he is ruling. As the apostle Paul taught, Christ began his rule at the resurrection and continues his rule until all the enemies are put under his feet, the last enemy being death (1 Corinthians 15:20-26).

Return to Luke 9:27. Jesus declares that some standing there would not see death until seeing the kingdom of God arrive. The Acts 2 event is still a year or two away. Perhaps some of the crowds would

die in the next year or two before the kingdom arrived. We do know of one apostle who died and did not see the arrival of the kingdom—Judas Iscariot. Some of the apostles would see the arrival of the kingdom but not all. Jesus is not speaking about the transfiguration, which would happen a week later. Jesus is speaking about the arrival of the kingdom described in Acts 1:6-8 and Acts 2.

We need to consider one final question: Why does Jesus mention this in connection with the foretelling of his death and the need for his followers to take up the cross? I believe the message is that the kingdom is still going to come in spite of his rejection. The Jewish teaching of the day expected the Messiah to take the throne, establish his rule, and overthrow the heathen and Gentile nations and powers. One can read the War Scroll and other scrolls from the Qumran community to see this expectation. Jesus is wrapping up a point that he began in verses 18-22. The Messiah is going to rule, but not like you think. The Messiah is going to establish his kingdom, but not like you think. Jesus is going to suffer, be rejected, killed, and be raised three days later. Despite this rejection, the kingdom of God is coming in their lifetime. There were people standing there who would not die until they saw the kingdom of God arrive with power. The kingdom of God is coming in spite of his rejection. Do not think that the plan has been foiled when Jesus is rejected and killed. This **IS** the plan! This is the way that Jesus will establish his kingdom and bringing salvation to the world.

Seeing Jesus' Glory
Luke 9:28-36

From the very beginning there has been nothing about the appearance of Jesus that would cause you to think that he was anything more than just another boy, the son of a carpenter. To the world, Jesus was simply the son of Joseph. To the few, Jesus was the Son of God. But nothing about his appearance gave you the impression that he was something more. Consider the words of the prophet Isaiah.

"He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him." (Isaiah 53:2 ESV)

But for a moment in time three apostles saw something more. For a moment Peter, James, and John saw something great. They saw Jesus for who he really was in his physical appearance. No longer did they see merely Jesus the human. Notice the careful words of Luke 9:32, "They saw his glory." Luke explains that the appearance of Jesus' face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white (9:29). Matthew adds that the face of Jesus shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light (Matthew 17:2). Mark records that his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them (Mark 9:3). For a moment everything about the appearance of Jesus changed. Bock simply states, "Jesus was physically transformed into a radiant figure whose brilliance extended to his clothes" (*Baker Exegetical Commentary, Luke, 867*).

Jesus is not the only one appearing in glory. There were two men talking with Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Verse 31 tells us that Moses and Elijah appeared in glory. I think we must pause here for a moment and consider that Moses and Elijah were alive. Moses had died around 1500 years before this event and Elijah had been caught up into heaven in a chariot of fire around 900 years earlier. Yet here they are alive and appearing in glory. We are seeing proof of the resurrection. God is the God of the living. It is also interesting that Peter knows who Moses and Elijah are. He had never seen them before yet he recognizes that these men are Moses and Elijah (9:33). Of even greater interest is that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah are having a discussion. Verse 31 tells us that Moses and Elijah are speaking about Jesus' departure. Your reference in your Bible may point out that the Greek word is "exodus" which is interesting consider that Moses led the great exodus from Egypt and are now talking about Jesus' exodus. It is not merely a discussion about death, but a discussion about Jesus' departure from this world.

What would you have done at this moment? Imagine that you are either Peter, James, or John. You are witnessing the most amazing event. You are seeing the true glory of God in Jesus. You are seeing the dead alive in Moses and Elijah. You are seeing two of the great figures in Israel's history. Moses, who was the deliverer of the nation of Israel and gave the Law of God to the people at Mount Sinai. Moses who had prophesied that God would raise up a deliverer for the people one day.

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen." (Deuteronomy 18:15 ESV)

You are also looking at Elijah. He is the great prophet of God who performed many great miracles. Think about his great victory over the prophets of Baal. Think about how he withstood the most wicked king and queen in the history of Israel, Ahab and Jezebel. Think about Elijah who did not die but was carried to the Lord in the chariot of fire. Moses and Elijah are a representation of the Law and the Prophet. They also represent the hope of Israel. This scene is picturing the fulfillment of what the Law and the Prophets pointed toward. This transfiguration scene shows that the hope of Israel is found in the glorious Jesus. What would you do? What would you say?

I love what Peter says. Some are very critical of Peter but I really like what he says. Peter says, "Master, it is good that we are here." This is awesome! We are seeing something fantastic. Let's make

sure that this never ends! Do you want us to make three tents, one for each of you? You must appreciate the parenthetical, "Not knowing what he said." Peter does not know what to say. But he knows what he is looking at is awesome and he does not want it to end. This is a glorious event.

God's Validation

Before anything else can happen, God the Father intervenes. As Peter is asking about building tents, a cloud came and overshadowed them. They were afraid as they entered the cloud. Then a voice comes out of the cloud making an important declaration.

"This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35 ESV)

The gospel of Luke has been asking and answer the question, "Who is this Jesus?" In our last lesson we saw Jesus even ask this question of his disciples. "Who do you say that I am?" The apostles responded that Jesus is the Christ of God, which is the correct answer. The apostles understand that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah and deliverer. God is now going to answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" God's answer is threefold. This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him."

My Son

The Father first declares that Jesus is his Son. The image of sonship can be seen in Psalm 2. The peoples of the earth plot in vain against the Lord and his Anointed (Psalm 2:1-2). Remember that Peter and the apostles have confessed Jesus to be the Christ of God. The terms "Christ" and "Messiah" mean "anointed." The anointed one was the king who would sit on David's throne. Jesus is the anointed one. The Lord laughs at the efforts of humans to overthrow the plans of God (2:6). The Lord sets his king on Zion, which is his Anointed. Recall in our last lesson we noted that being the "anointed one" had a reference to kingship. Now the decree is made: **"The Lord said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'" (Psalm 2:7-9 ESV)** When God the Father calls Jesus his Son, he is granting him a royal title, establishing him as king ruling over his kingdom. Jesus is the royal and eternal Son, the anointed king.

The writer of Hebrews also shows us that Jesus as Son means that he is the eternal king. Read Hebrews 1:1-9 and notice the connection between Jesus as the eternal Son and his eternal rule and kingship.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. 5 For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? 6 And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." 7 Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire." 8 But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." (Hebrews 1:1-9 ESV)

Jesus is not just the Messiah in terms of what the Jews thought he would be as a deliverer and redeemer for the nation. Jesus the eternal God. Jesus is the eternal king. Jesus has been appointed and anointed by the Father to rule over the earth. After making purifications for sins through his death, Jesus

sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, superior to and ruling over all created beings. Notice in Hebrews 1:8 that the Father says concerning the Son, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.” When the Father declared, “This is my Son,” he spoke volumes about who Jesus is. The Father confirmed that Jesus is not only the Messiah, but he is the eternal God.

The Chosen One

The Father calling Jesus, “The chosen one,” also fits the imagery of the eternal kingship of Jesus. Isaiah prophesies about the coming of the chosen one.

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; 3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. (Isaiah 42:1–4 ESV)

The chosen one, Jesus, is the one whom the Father’s soul delights. The Father has put his Spirit on him. He has been anointed to bring justice to the nations and establish his rule throughout the earth.

Listen To Him

The Father was not only giving Peter, James, and John a command to listen to the words of Jesus, but was also confirming that Jesus is fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy.

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.” (Deuteronomy 18:15 ESV)

The Father just connected Jesus to the prophet that Moses spoke of that would come. Moses said that when this prophet comes, you must listen to him. The Father speaks from heaven, “This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him!” Jesus is the deliverer. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the great prophet that Moses spoke would come. Jesus is the eternal Son. Jesus is the king. Do you see why Peter, James, and John keep silent after hearing these words and seeing the glory of Jesus (Luke 9:36)? They are simply blown away by what they have seen and heard. They have seen Moses and Elijah in glory. They have seen Jesus in dazzling white, bright like the sun shining. They have heard the voice of the Father confirming that Jesus is the eternal God, the messianic king sent to rule the nations. The command is given to them and to us: we must listen to Jesus.

Peter’s Instructions

In the second letter written by the apostle Peter, Peter reflects back at this glorious moment and expounds upon the message learned from the event. Turn in your scriptures to 2 Peter 1:16-19.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Peter 1:16–19 ESV)

Peter declares that they were eyewitnesses of the majesty of Jesus. The words in verse 17 match the words recorded in Matthew’s account of the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). Peter says that they heard this voice when they were with Jesus on the holy mountain. Consider the point Peter wants us to understand. We have something so certain and sure — the prophetic word. We have the holy word of

God revealed to us from Jesus to his Holy Spirit who communicated the word to his apostles who wrote it down. Pay attention to the word of God. Pay attention to God's word like a lamp in a dark place. When you are in a dark room and you have a flashlight, you pay careful attention to everything in the room, so that you do not trip and fall. God's word is the light in the darkness of this world. Pay attention to the words of God, not the world. Listen to the Son and the words that he revealed through the Holy Spirit. Read the word. It is filled with glory. It will show you the way to go. It will guide you to the Lord. Jesus is the eternal Son, the king over all. Listen to him!

Mistakes In Discipleship Luke 9:37-56

Do you ever have those days when you feel like you cannot do anything right? It is just another one of those days when everything goes wrong and everything you do is wrong. Luke records for us a collection of events where the disciples experience repeated failure. We have reached a pivot point in the gospel of Luke. Up to this point Luke has been asking and answering the question, "Who is this Jesus?" The repeated answer has been that Jesus is the all-powerful King, Messiah, and God. In our last lesson we saw the declaration of the Father himself, "This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him!" The focus of Luke's gospel now shifts to describing who will follow Jesus and how to follow Jesus. In our study today we will look at each of the failures and what we learn from the mistakes made by the disciples. Then we will conclude with considering why these failures are recorded by Luke.

Lack of Faith (9:37-43)

Luke records that it is the next day after the transfiguration experience. When they come down from the mountain there is a great crowd awaiting them. A man from the crowd cries out to Jesus about his only son who has an unclean spirit in him. Here is the interesting point to the story. He had begged Jesus' disciples to cast out this unclean spirit, but they could not. Turn back in the scriptures to Luke 9:1 and recall what Jesus had given his twelve disciples. **"And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases" (Luke 9:1).** Jesus gave these men power and authority over ALL demons. Yet the disciples could not cast out this demon. What happened? Why couldn't they cast out the demon? Why did the disciples fail?

Notice Jesus' answer that explains why the disciples had failed. **"O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?"** It is important to note who Jesus is talking to. Jesus is not talking to the crowds. He is not talking to this father or his son. He is talking to his disciples. The problem was not the power of God. The problem was the lack of the faith in the disciples. This was a strong demon that was throwing this boy into the fire and into the water (cf. Mark 9:22). In the Matthew account, Jesus makes an explicit that the disciples lacked faith (Matthew 17:20). In Mark's account, Jesus ties this lack of faith to a lack of prayer (Mark 9:29). When we put the pieces together we get a picture of the apostles attempting to cast out the demons themselves, rather than relying and trusting in the power of God.

How easily we can make the same mistake in discipleship! We neglect prayer and lack faith because we think we have life figured out and we can do things ourselves. We have life under control and we do not rely on God. We rely on ourselves. Then we wonder why we get into trouble. Then we cannot understand why life falls apart. Were we praying to the Lord or were we trusting in ourselves for guidance? Were we trusting our lives into the hands of God or were we running our life with no regard for God and his will? We make such a great mistake when our successes with the Lord cause us to stop trusting in God. We forgot that God is the giver of life's blessings. Our prosperity and successes are often a tool used by Satan to leave God and quit trusting him.

Lack of Seeking (9:43-45)

While everyone was amazed at the greatness and majesty of God, Jesus says another shocking statement. **"Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men."** This is the second time that Jesus has spoken about his upcoming arrest and death. The disciples did not understand how this could take place in the context of God's plan for his Chosen One. If he is the Chosen One, how can he be delivered into the hands of men? Luke records something that

the other accounts do not note. The disciples did not understand because it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it. What does this mean? I do not believe that Luke is suggesting that Jesus was trying to teach his disciples but they could not understand it because God was somehow blinding them. Instead, Luke is teaching something that we observed earlier in his gospel account.

Turn back to Luke 8:10. Recall when we studied this text that the reason the disciples were able to know the secrets of the kingdom was because they were seeking. The crowd did not come to Jesus and ask him to explain the parable of the soils, but the disciples did. Since they were asking and seeking, Jesus revealed to them the meaning of the parable. The same point is being made in Luke 9:45. Why did the disciples not understand what Jesus was saying about his arrest and death? Why was it concealed from them to understand the meaning of Jesus' words? The explanation is found in verse 45. **"They were afraid to ask him about this saying."** The disciples stopped asking. Before when Jesus said something they did not understand, they went to him and asked him. Now the disciples stop asking. Since they stopped asking they cannot understand what Jesus means.

Another enormous mistake we make is that we stop asking questions and stop seeking. We grow comfortable with our knowledge of God and stop trying to learn more. This is danger for every disciple, especially as we grow in knowledge. We can think that we know all that we need to know. We think we know all the doctrines found in the scriptures. We think we know all we need to know about a particular book in the Bible. Therefore, we stop studying, asking, and seeking to learn about God. We must never think we understand everything about the scriptures and must never be afraid to ask questions. Have you stopped studying for our Bible studies? Have you stopped reading God's word each day? Have you stopped trying to learn everything that God has taught us in his word? When we stop seeking, then we are not going to understand, which is a very dangerous position to be in. We need to know what God asks of us so that we can be his disciples.

Lack of Humility (9:46-48)

Next, an argument starts between the disciples about which of them were the greatest. This argument most definitely misses the point of being a disciple of Jesus. They are arguing over who is the best disciple. They are arguing over who is more important. They are disputing about who is the greatest among them. We have such a problem with this. We want to be important. We want to be highly regarded. Some preach for the title. Some elders lead for the power. Some deacons serve for the recognition. Some teach to be in charge. Some think they need to have their voice heard in the Christian crowd.

Notice what Jesus does to address this problem. He finds a child and puts him by his side. Then Jesus taught his disciples, **"Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great."** To understand this teaching we must realize that children were disregarded in that society. Spending time with children was considered foolish and a waste of time. So what Jesus is saying is countercultural. Receiving children has no kickbacks or future favors. There is not an "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine" attitude when dealing with a child. Receiving children means you are not thinking about yourself but about the other. Instead of seeking status for ourselves, we must identify ourselves with those who do not have any status. Essentially, humility is required in this kingdom, not greatness. We lack humility when we start comparing ourselves with others. We think we are better than others or more important than others because we are comparing ourselves with others. To be part of God's kingdom means that we do not care about any of those things. We do not associate with people because of what we think they can do for us. We do not concern ourselves with being recognized by others. We associate ourselves with people who are deemed without status or power. We have no regard for status. We see

ourselves as servants of God and nothing more. How can we think we are great? I submit to you that when we compare ourselves to the Lord we will never think of ourselves as great. Then we will have proper perspective.

Lack of Wisdom (9:49-50)

Notice how John answers this teaching that Jesus has given on not trying to be great. **"Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us." (Luke 9:49 ESV)** Have you ever had one of your children be proud of something they did that you were not happy about? The child, full of excitement, says, "Look at my drawing." However, this great artistic work was done on the wall in your house. That seems to be the idea of what is happening here. John says this looking for approval. But what they had done was wrong. **But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you." (Luke 9:50 ESV)** John lacked the wisdom to understand that our service to the Lord is not about rivalry or competition. Other followers of Jesus are not the enemy. So often we see Christians trying to destroy other Christians. It truly boggles my mind. Rather than fighting Satan and saving souls, we are fighting each other. We are not competing with other Christians. We are not in a contest with other Christians or other churches. If a church or Christian is teaching and practicing what God says, then there is no competition. We are working together in God's kingdom. If a church or Christians is not practicing and teaching what God says, then Jesus and the apostles have much to say about such false teachers and their condemnation. True followers of God must have the wisdom to see that we are working together, not against each other. In my observations, we turn on each other and fight one another when we lose sight of our purpose of reaching the lost. When we stop looking out to saving people, then we turn our attention to ourselves and begin to fight among ourselves.

Lack of Mercy (9:51-56)

The final scene in this listing of mistakes in discipleship is found in verses 51-56. Jesus has determined to go to Jerusalem. Jesus sends messengers into a Samaritan village to make preparations for Jesus' arrival. However, the Samaritans did not receive him. They rejected Jesus because he set his face toward Jerusalem. This could simply mean that Jesus was rejected because of where Jesus was going. However, it is possible that something more is being said than simply the Samaritans hating the Jews (considering the success Jesus had in Samaria in John 4). Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem and we have been told twice what is going to happen in Jerusalem. Jesus is going to be rejected, suffer, and die. Luke may be telling us that the Samaritans are rejecting this message just as the disciples were rejecting this message. In either case, the Samaritans are rejecting Jesus as the Messiah.

This rejection of Jesus gives James and John an idea. **"Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"** Wow! What a response to this rejection? Lord, do you want us to call fire to kill them all right now? Let's kill them. Jesus turns and rebukes them for this. We learn that our zeal for Christ can be exhibited in unholy ways. Our good intentions can lead to grievous actions. It is not enough for us to have zeal and mean well in our actions. We are called to have mercy. We must offer grace and warn the lost of their accountability before God. Our job is ministry not vindication. The time for judgment will come. We need to call the world to repentance now. We need to handle rejection with mercy. Retaliation is never a Christian answer. We cannot be representatives of Christ when we lack mercy. **"For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment." (James 2:13 ESV)**

Conclusion

Why does Luke record these five failures of the disciples? I think we learn one very simple but extremely important point. Failures will happen. Keep following Jesus. We are going to make mistakes as we try to serve the Lord. Don't give up when you fall short. Learn from your mistakes, let God pick you up, and continue to follow the Lord.

Follow Jesus
Luke 9:57-62

As we noted in the last lesson, this is the turning point in the gospel of Luke. Jesus has made it his resolve to go to Jerusalem. This will be his final journey to Jerusalem. Once Jesus is there, he is going to be betrayed, arrested, and killed. Jesus has predicted this outcome, however his disciples have not understood these things. The section also begins with the rejection of Jesus from the Samaritans. Rejection is going to be another theme. As Jesus goes to Jerusalem, rejection will be the ultimate end. In our lesson today, the main point of the story is following. Three times the word "follow" appears in these six verses. There is an implicit question being asked by Luke as he tells of these who desires to follow Jesus. "Will you follow Jesus all the way?" Three people approach Jesus to be his disciple.

Follow Wherever Jesus Goes (9:57-58)

The first person says, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus' response to this is startling to us. We are living in a time where such statements are enough. We just want people to love God and go to church. Here is a person who says that he will be a follower. We probably would have accepted this person. Jesus does not simply accept a person who says he wants to follow Jesus. Jesus wants you to know what is involved in following Jesus. Following Jesus is not just simply saying that you want to follow. We have to stop deceiving people with the idea that there is no commitment or sacrifice required to follow Jesus. Sometimes we are trying to lower the bar to try to get people to follow when Jesus raised the bar. We are not doing you any good to lie to you so that you think you are right with God and are a disciple of Jesus by suggesting that you coming here and doing nothing is all that is required of you.

This man says that he will follow Jesus everywhere. Jesus immediately challenges this man on that thought. Jesus does not know where he going to sleep tonight. If Jesus were to start walking south without any preparations or accommodations lined up for the night, would you follow him? Would you go with him not knowing where you are going to sleep? Would you sleep on the sidewalk to follow him? Would you sleep in the grass to follow him? Will you really go with him wherever he goes? True disciples will follow Jesus wherever he goes, regardless of the inconvenience or sacrifice. Jesus is warning this person that following Jesus is not easy. We put Jesus before our comforts. You are following a broke, homeless person who was betrayed and murdered. Do we understand who we are following? The path of discipleship is not an easy path. It is the best path for your life but it is not comfortable or convenient. Our comfort does not come before following Jesus.

Bury My Father (9:59-60)

The second person also wants to follow Jesus. But this person has one caveat. He has one other priority ahead of Jesus. Jesus will be his priority, but not his first priority. He has one other thing that he has to do and then he will follow Jesus. This is not a cult text teaching for people to cut off their family ties. Rather, we are to understand that even our best excuse is rejected by Jesus. Jesus shows us that all these other situations, duties, and demands in life cannot come into conflict with following Jesus. Nothing is to block the pursuit of discipleship and nothing is to postpone its start. Let other people take care of these other obligations. Your primary obligation is to Jesus. The old way of doing things is over and we have new priorities. I cannot understand how we think we can keep the same schedule and same priorities after coming to Jesus. The most important thing is following Jesus and proclaiming the kingdom of God.

When Jesus says to let the dead bury the dead, he is teaching a powerful principle about how we perceive our discipleship. Let school take care of your school obligations. Let the coach take care of your sports obligations. Let your boss deal with your work requirements. Let the house clean itself. The point is that these other obligations and duties we have in life are not more important than serving, worshiping, and following Jesus. We think we have these golden excuses for our Lord. I had to work. I had school. I had sports. I had family in town. I was tired. I got up early. I didn't sleep well. I have to get up early. I have to stay out late. Jesus told this man to let the dead bury the dead. We let all of these other circumstances and obligations in life prevent us from following Jesus the way he demands us to follow him. Jesus does not accept even our best excuse. I know this sounds harsh but the reason it sounds harsh is because we do not understand the demands of discipleship. Jesus already taught that anyone who wants to follow him must deny him and take up the cross daily. We are dead to our old way of living. Now we are confirming that cost for discipleship. All the things in life that are so important and that occupy our time, whether sinful or not, are subjugated so that we will follow Jesus. School is not more important than serving God. Work is not more important than worshiping God. Sports is not more important than following him. Let other people take care of those obligations. Your obligation is to follow Jesus.

Say Farewell To Those At Home (9:61-62)

This third person also seems to have a reasonable request. To follow Jesus properly means that there is no looking back. Jesus is giving a warning. You have to cut off the old life to follow Jesus. Otherwise, we follow Jesus initially only to long for the old life later. How many times the scriptures warn us against going back and thinking back to the old life with affection! When the Israelites came out of Egypt, the first thing that do is start looking back to Egypt. They remember the food they had and think that they had it so good. They forgot that their labor was harsh, that they were slaves, and that their baby boys were being thrown into the Nile River. They forgot the deliverance God had given them and looked back longingly to Egypt. When God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah the Lord explicitly commanded Lot and his family not to look back to the city as they fled. Lot's wife did look back and was turned into a pillar of salt. The point is that once we commit to Jesus, we must hold to that commitment without wavering. We are not to look back but press forward following Jesus. Following Jesus requires undivided loyalty. Discipleship is a life long commitment to follow him.

The image Jesus uses is very appropriate for the warning. What will happen if you are looking behind you while plowing? You will not plow a straight line and your work will be ruined. For a modern example, what will happen if you are looking behind you while driving? You are not going to drive straight and you will get into an accident. Our eyes are to be focused forward on Jesus. Jesus even says that we are not fit for the kingdom if we are looking back. Not that we are not in the kingdom, but we are not fit to belong with the Lord if we choose to look back.

Conclusion

Three people say they will follow Jesus. Jesus says that they cannot. Desire is not enough for discipleship. Everything is second to following Jesus. We must go anywhere Jesus leads. Jesus must come before our comforts. Further, Jesus must come before our obligations and duties. It does not matter what we think we need to do in this world, let others take care of those obligations and you follow Jesus. Finally, our eyes must be focused forward on Jesus, never looking back to the life we have crucified with Christ.

The Harvest Is Plentiful Luke 10:1-17

In Luke 9 we saw Jesus sending out his twelve apostles proclaiming the kingdom of God in the towns and villages of Galilee. In chapter 10 Jesus sends a larger group into every town and place where Jesus is about to go. There is, however, a significant problem. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." Jesus looks at the nation with a spiritual lens. Jesus does not look at the condition of Israel with all of its depravity and wickedness and think that his teaching is a wasted effort. Remember the nation is so wicked that God will destroy it 40 years after Jesus' ministry. Jesus sees souls and sees a problem. There is a harvest out there but there are not enough laborers to gather the harvest.

Before we move forward in the story we need to consider if we have the same outlook as Jesus or if we have a pessimistic, defeated outlook. It is easy to develop an attitude that believes that we are the only ones who have any spiritual interest. It is easy to assume that the world is more wicked now than in the first century and no one is interested in God. Or we can have the mentality that everyone has already heard and therefore the harvest has been reaped. Everyone has heard about Jesus and there is nothing left to do. While the world has heard of Jesus and has a concept of God, I submit to you the issue is that majority of the world is misinformed. People have been misled. People have been turned off by the religious nonsense that is promoted as Christianity. They have seen self-righteous people wearing robes, performing actions that do not make sense and are not taught in the scriptures. They have seen people with irrational faith unable to defend what they believe. Satan's effort has been to flood people with misinformation so it is difficult to determine what is truth and what is error.

I submit to you that this situation is not entirely different from the first century. In the nation of Israel we read about these self-righteous people who do not follow the actual law of Moses but their own rules and traditions. They are burdening the people with false teachings about what God demands of them. The Pharisees and Sadducees are directly contradicting the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. If we extend outside the boundaries of Israel to the Roman world then we will see a similar picture of misinformation. It was a time of religious pluralism. The call was to worship the god of your choice and it did not matter what god you worshipped. Greek and Roman paganism were the norm and the only thing condemned was to suggest that there was only one God and only he was to be worshipped. We must open our eyes and see that we are living in the same world that Jesus and the apostles lived in. But do we have the same spiritual outlook that Jesus had? I believe most Christians have an evangelistic heart but do not know what to do. We want to see people come to Christ to be saved but do not know what part they can play in that effort. Let's look at what Jesus teaches us about how to be laborers for the harvest.

Pray (10:2)

Jesus' answer to the problem of a great harvest and few laborers is prayer. The first thing is not to have a strategy session. The first step is prayer. We must remember only God can give the increase. We can do all the planting and watering we want but God is the one who provides the growth. Yet we often leave off this critically important step. Do we believe that there is a great harvest that we must pray for so that they can be saved? Will we pray for their salvation? Will we pray that we can find them and teach them?

We do not exist here for survival. We exist to reach more people and share the good news of Jesus. What is the vision that you have for this congregation? I have a very large, optimistic vision for this group. I do not see this church maintaining its small church status. My vision is that we will not only expand our facilities to the most this property can handle, but that we will have multiple Sunday services

and will spin off other locations in this county. It is easy to reach contentment at round numbers. Reach 100 and feel content. Reach 200 in membership and become content. Touch 300 and become complacent. It is the problem of round numbers. We cannot have a low opinion of what we think we can be and the impact we can make in this community. If your vision for Haverhill is that this is the way we will always be, then you are not praying to the Lord to work big things. We exist for the salvation of others, not for the maintaining of ourselves. We should have a hope and expectation for growth. We have the word of God. The gospel is the power of God to salvation. To think that we cannot grow explosively is to have a low view of the power of the gospel. We are not lacking any ingredients for explosive growth. God is still bringing people to salvation everyday. If we have the desire and we pray to the Lord for the harvest, then there is nothing that can stop us. Do we have the desire? Do we have the faith? Do we have the earnest prayers? Pray is the first way that you can participate in evangelism in this church.

Go (10:3-9)

Notice that Jesus does not say that they need to pray and sit down on the ground and hope something happens. The very next words after praying is "Go your way." First, we pray but then we need to be part of the answer. Jesus said there is a big problem. The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Pray for laborers and then become a laborer. You are an answer to our prayers. You are an instrument in the harvest of the Lord. There are a number of things Jesus teaches about how we are to go.

Go in teamwork. Jesus does not send these disciples to go by themselves. We make a tremendous mistake by thinking that this is an individual effort and we have to do this work alone. In verse 1 we read that Jesus sent them in pairs. There are myriads of reasons why we should do this work together. There is encouragement in doing the work together. There is confidence in teaching together. We learn from each other when we work together. Pick a Christian brother or sister here and work together in praying about our evangelism and then go and be an answer. Ask people together. Tell people about Jesus together. Husbands and wives can do this work together, a natural work that you can do. Two sisters in Christ can work together. Two brothers in Christ can work together. Take advantage of the moment today after services and ask someone to work with you in the efforts of evangelism. Our community groups are about teamwork. You invite your friends to the study and we all are working together to teach. This reminds us that we need to be conscious of the things that we say and ask if our community group has an unbeliever. We need to make sure we are not saying things that would become a stumbling block to them coming to the truth.

Go in wisdom. Jesus says that he was sending them out as lambs in the midst of wolves. That doesn't sound very good because wolves are natural enemies of sheep. Anticipate difficulties in our evangelistic efforts. We are not going out to a world that loves the Lord. When Jesus sent out his twelve apostles he told them there would be rejection. Jesus tells this group of disciples that they will also have rejection. Notice in verse 10 that there could be a whole town that rejected them. We could have all of our neighbors say no. We could have our whole subdivision say no. Understand that people will say no but do not be deterred.

Go in urgency. Jesus said in verse 4 to not take anything and to not greet anyone on the road. Jesus is not teaching to be rude and unprepared. Jesus is teaching us the urgency of the task. Don't get distracted from your God given purpose. Nothing can interfere with the purpose. Don't focus on all the peripherals. Don't make evangelism more difficult than it is. We try to make teaching and inviting so much harder than it really is. Jesus does not tell us what to say. These disciples are not given a method. Why? Because there is not just one method to reach people. There is your method to reach people. Use

the method that works for you. Don't think that you have to do evangelism some particular way. Take a stack of Bibles (we have many to give to you if you will do this). Go to your neighbors and ask them, "If I give you a Bible will you read it?" If they say no, then move on. If they say yes, then give them a Bible and ask them if they have any questions. Give them a card and tell them where you go. Be a laborer in the field. We are the instruments in a dark world bringing people to the light of Christ.

Go in trust. We saw this when Jesus sent out his apostles in Luke 9. We see Jesus instructing these disciples to put their trust in God. They took nothing with them as they went. They were to rely on the hospitality of the people they were staying with as they taught. Jesus taught his disciples to be sacrificial servants. We must be ready to sacrifice for the kingdom of God and trust in God to provide. It means that we will not be able to spend our free time working on the yard or watching television. We will make sacrifices to our time and our comforts to extend the offer of the gospel to the world.

Teach God's Warning (10:10-16)

Regardless of the people's refusal, the kingdom of God was coming (10:11). When these disciples were rejected they were to warn the people of the unbearable judgment for those outside of Christ. Notice that Jesus says in verse 12 that it would be more bearable for Sodom than for those who reject the message his disciples were teaching. It is extremely serious to reject God's salvation message. Jesus pronounces woes against the people of Israel for rejecting the message. Jesus says that unbelieving Gentiles would have responded to the signs and the teachings done in those towns. We must tell people what we are trying to save them from. Salvation does not make sense until we explain the peril every person is in. Eternal life and eternal punishment are at stake.

Joy In The Harvest (10:17)

When the disciples returned they returned with joy. No matter how it goes in your evangelism efforts, you will return home with an inexpressible joy from knowing you have accomplished God's will. Even when we have to shake the dust off of our feet there is great joy in doing your part in the kingdom of God. But we will not come back with failures. God wants us in the field and there is a harvest to bring in. When these disciples return they do not come back with joy only from being obedient to the will of the Lord. They are joyful because of the power of Christ's kingdom is having success in the world.

Conclusion

We noted in the first nine chapters of Luke that the author is showing us who Jesus is. Beginning in chapter 9 Luke has transitioned to teaching who can follow Jesus. Followers of Jesus are laborers in the field of the world reaping the harvest. There is nothing technical or complicated about working in God's kingdom. Jesus summed out how we labor in his kingdom. (1) Pray, (2) Go, (3) Teach, (4) Expect return, (5) Rejoice in spreading the kingdom. God has given us a mission. We need to stay on mission.

At the beginning of chapter 10 Jesus appointed 72 to go before him preaching that the kingdom of God has come near. Every town and place where Jesus was about to go these 72 went ahead of him proclaiming the coming of the kingdom. Now the 72 return and give a report to Jesus.

Power of Christ's Kingdom

When the 72 return, they return with joy saying that even the demons were subject to them in the name of Jesus Christ. This would be an exciting and joyous time. Jesus has given these disciples authority to proclaim the kingdom message. Even demons were cast out by Christ's authority. They are joyful not just because of they can cast out demons, but because of what it means.

"On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. And on that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more. And also I will remove from the land the prophets and the unclean spirit." (Zechariah 13:1-2)

Zechariah had promised that there would be a time when a fountain of salvation was opened to cleanse people from their sins and impurity. At the same time the unclean spirits would be removed from the land. Since the 72 were able to remove the unclean spirits, the conclusion is that a fountain was opened to cleanse the people of their sins. How exciting to see that cleansing of sins had come because the demons were being cast out. The casting out of demons was a visible sign to all that the kingdom of God had come near and forgiveness of sins was available.

Jesus responds to the disciples' joy by saying that he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. This is not a point of information. Jesus is not saying that a long time ago at the beginning of time he saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning. This is not talking about a time before the creation of the earth when Satan fell to the earth. "Falling from heaven" is a metaphor in the scriptures to describe a ruler experiencing a loss of power and rule.

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! (Isaiah 14:12 ESV)

Many, unfortunately, apply this scripture to Satan. But Isaiah is prophesying against the king of Babylon. Notice the context of the passage.

When the LORD has given you rest from your pain and turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: (Isaiah 14:3-4 ESV)

The prophecy was simple. The king of Babylon was going to lose his rule and authority. The imagery used to describe that loss is falling from heaven. Jesus is saying that he saw Satan's power over people decisively broken. The kingdom of Christ has come and the demons being cast out was proof that Satan's power was broken by the power of Christ. Our world has been fascinated about demon possession for many years. However, the scriptures are clear that Satan's power was broken in the days of Jesus. Demon possession cannot occur against one's will today like we read about in the days of Jesus' life. That power of Satan has been broken. Jesus uses the imagery of Satan falling like lightning from heaven to teach this to his disciples.

Further, this great power has been delegated to the 72. Notice in verse 19 that Jesus tells them that he gave them authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall hurt you. This is also a metaphor used in the scriptures to describe God's protection. In

Deuteronomy 8:15 similar language is used to describe God's protection as he led the people of Israel through the wilderness. The point Jesus is making is that when it comes to Satan, these disciples have all authority to overcome.

Then Jesus says something very interesting in verse 20. There is even greater rejoicing to be had. Don't rejoice that the unclean spirits are subject to you. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Rejoice in what God has done for you. Eternal life is to be our deepest joy in Christ. This knowledge is the lasting joy given to us that gets us through this life. Worldly joys are temporal. Physical things bring a shallow, momentary happiness. Knowing that you have eternal life brings true joy. Knowing that your names are written in heaven is the greatest hope and greatest joy we can experience. If you want to truly have peace, peace is found by knowing that it does not matter what happens to you in this world. You know that you are with God and have eternal life.

Jesus Rejoices

In the same hour Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit. Jesus is finding satisfaction and joy in God's will being fulfilled. We can see this is what it means for Jesus to rejoice in the Spirit because of the words he prays in verse 21. Notice how the verse ends, "For such was your gracious will." God's will is being done before the very eyes of these disciples. We must consider what we find the most personal satisfaction in. In what do you find your greatest joy? Jesus rejoiced at seeing God's will being done. Our satisfaction must be found in the will of God being accomplished. There is great satisfaction in participating in reaching out to the world with the gospel. There is great satisfaction when a lost soul is saved. Lasting satisfaction isn't found in sports, possessions, wealth, or anything else in this life.

Notice that Jesus' rejoicing is expressed in thanksgiving to the Father. Our joy must be expressed by giving God our thanks for being part of God's plan and purposes. How often we forget to express our joy to God. We forget to be thankful to God when our prayers are answered. We petition God so fervently yet lose our fervor when our prayers are answered. Many of the psalms are beautiful poems of praising God for what he has done. We must never lose our heart of thankfulness.

Part of Jesus' thanks is that these great truths and joy about the kingdom have been hidden from the wise and understanding but have revealed them to little children. Again, Jesus is using a metaphor to thank God that what God is doing in his purpose can be understood by the simple. The wise seem to miss the great truths of God. The religious establishment seem to miss the great truths of God. You do not need special knowledge to understand the scriptures. You do not need someone to explain to you God's purpose. God has revealed himself in such a way that all people can understand. There is so often a power play made today in every arena of life. Politicians want you to think they know more than you. Employers want you to think they know more than you. Religious leaders and teachers want you to think that they know more than you. God says that you can know for yourself. It was God's gracious will to reveal himself to all people, not just the rich or the wise or the powerful. All people have access to this great kingdom of Christ.

Jesus further points out how you can receive this knowledge. Jesus said that all things had been given to him by the Father. He describes the intimate relationship that the Father and Son have. Only the Father knows the Son. Only the Son knows the Father. But then Jesus says, "And anyone to whom the Son choose to reveal him." The Son knows the Father and you cannot know God without listening to the Son. The Son reveals the Father. You must know Jesus to know God. Everyone today wants to bypass Christ and think that they are spiritual and have a relationship with God. Jesus tells us that this is improper thinking. It is not possible to have a relationship with God without Jesus. You must obey Jesus and listen to Jesus' words to know God.

Joy To See The Kingdom's Arrival

Finally, Jesus concludes by speaking privately to his disciples. **"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."** (Luke 10:23–24 ESV)

Those disciples were living in a special time. The people of the Old Testament were looking forward to the day when the Messiah would arrive and bring his kingdom. They desired to see what these disciples were seeing. They wanted to hear what they were hearing. Think about the privileged position we are in. We also have been able to hear the great words of Jesus, words that those who lived long ago earnestly desired to hear. We must appreciate how we can hold in our hands the revealed word of God that shows us how to come to the Father. We have the word of God that tells us we have access to his kingdom and can belong to the family of God. Everyone who lived during the days of Christ and after Christ's resurrection have the blessing of seeing unfolding of God's wisdom.

Conclusion

The world seeks joy in all the wrong places. From partying to seclusion people have tried to find lasting joy in this world only to fail. Lasting joy can only be found in Christ. Notice what the scriptures have taught us about finding joy. First, take joy knowing that your name is written in heaven. Second, there is joy in seeing God's purpose being fulfilled and being an instrument in that process. Third, there is joy in knowledge of God's will and understanding the salvation that has been made available for all people.

The parable of the good Samaritan is one that most people have heard. If you have grown up sitting on the pews then you have likely heard this parable many times. I do not want you to shut off your mind and ears at this point because you may think you already know this one. I want to focus our attention this morning on the part of the story that is often and easily neglected in our rush to interpret the parable.

The Question (10:25-28)

The first thing we must observe in the story is that a lawyer is asking the question. When we read of the lawyers in the scriptures we cannot think of trial lawyers like we have today. A lawyer means that he was an expert in the Law of Moses and an expert in Jewish law. He knew the laws of God and spent his time studying and teaching the Law. The second thing we must observe in the story is the motive behind the lawyer's question. Luke clearly reveals for us that this lawyer is trying to test Jesus. We have seen in our study of Gospel of Luke that the religious leaders of the day were doing anything they could to discredit Jesus. They will ask him questions to try to trip Jesus up so that he would say something or do something contrary to the Law of Moses. This is the effort of this lawyer. Therefore, when the lawyer asks the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" he is not asking as a genuine seeker. This is sad because this is a very important question. What must I do to inherit eternal life? It is a question that should be on the minds and hearts of every person. What does God require of me?

Jesus' response is appropriate. Since a lawyer is asking the question, he should be the one to know the answer to the question. Therefore, Jesus asks, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" Jesus responds by teaching that we look for the answer in God's law. What does the word of God have to say? This must be how we answer every question of life. What do the scriptures teach? The answer is not, "What do you think?" The answer is not, "What feels right to you?" The answer is always, "What do the scriptures teach?" This is Jesus' answer to this lawyer. What do you read in the Law? What is written in the Law?

The lawyer answers that the law says to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. The lawyer continues that one is to love one's neighbor as oneself. The lawyer quotes to passages found in the Law of Moses. The first is from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and the second is from Leviticus 19:18. Using these two texts the lawyer answers that this is what one must do inherit eternal life. Jesus agrees. He says, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he gave the answer that this lawyer gave. Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and to love one's neighbor as one's self.

I want us to consider a couple of thoughts. First, if we were ask the question today, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" what would you answer? We might come up with what has been called the five steps of salvation (as if that is all one must do). Would we have responded with this answer? This is the correct answer, but I am afraid that many of us would not give this answer. Jesus said that all of God's law hangs on these two commandments. If you are doing these two things, then you will be doing what God commands because you will have the heart of obedience.

The second question is simple. Have you done this? Have you loved the Lord your God with ALL your heart, with ALL your soul, with ALL your strength, and with ALL your mind? Have you loved your neighbor and done for your neighbor as you want done for you? We have a problem just like this lawyer because we have not done this. I hope you feel the corner that Jesus puts us in with this answer just as the lawyer felt it. If you want to inherit eternal life it is really simple. But who has done this? We love

ourselves with all our heart. We do what we want to do. We do not act with all our strength in love toward God. We ask questions like if we have to come to services. Do we have to go to Bible class? Do we have to come to a gospel meeting? Do we have to come back tonight? No, you don't have to do any of those things. But do you understand that you are to love the Lord with all your heart? Do you understand you are to love the Lord with all your strength? Our actions and these kinds of questions reveal that we are far from inheriting eternal life. Inheriting eternal life is not calling ourselves Christians. Inheriting eternal life is not Sunday morning attendance. Inheriting eternal life is not that you were baptized. Inheriting eternal life is loving the Lord with all your heart which leads to a showing of that love. Loving the Lord this deeply as the scriptures teach will compel us to love our neighbor. It will compel us to study his word. It will compel us to come worship him. It will compel us to join together with other believers. Feel the weight of what Jesus has done. Who has loved God wholeheartedly? Who has loved others in a supremely selfless way?

Need A Savior (10:29)

This properly frames verse 29. The lawyer desires to justify himself. Why is he trying to justify himself? The same reason we are trying to justify ourselves in our minds. He had not done what is required for eternal life. We have not done what is required for eternal life. We have two options. We can try to be like the lawyer and make excuses for ourselves. We can try to justify ourselves by finding a loophole in God's law. Notice the lawyer asks, "Who is my neighbor" in an effort to justify himself. Remember that the lawyer has approached Jesus trying to trip him up by putting him to the test. Jesus has turned the tables and now the lawyer is on the defensive. Rather than Jesus being shown as inadequate, the lawyer has been shown inadequate. To inherit eternal life the lawyer needs to justify himself. His thought is that he can lessen the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We can also go down that road. We try to justify ourselves and make excuses for ourselves as to why we do not love the Lord with ALL our heart and love our neighbors as ourselves. One example I can think of is taking the scripture where Jesus teaches that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. People come along and say that there was a gate where the camel had to kneel down to enter. Yet there is no evidence for this assertion. We are simply trying to justify ourselves rather than be cut to the heart that we are the rich and few of us will make it. In the same way, Jesus says to love the Lord with all your strength and we try to justify why that is not possible. We talk about having to provide for our families, having responsibilities, or come up with other excuses. We can act just like the lawyer. Can I beg you not to try to justify your actions? Jesus does not want our excuses. Jesus does not want us to try to justify ourselves.

He wants you to see that you need him. How differently the rest of this story would have gone if the lawyer had fallen down on his knees before the feet of Jesus in verse 29! If he would have been convicted in the heart to beg for forgiveness. He needed to beg for mercy. He needed to ask for salvation. Instead, he tries to justify himself. Jesus is trying to get us to see that you need a Savior. We haven't done what God demands. We need to cry out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Since the lawyer is trying to justify himself as we often attempt to do, Jesus must go deeper. Therefore, Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:30-37)

By telling the parable, Jesus has challenged the lawyer's assumption. The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Look at what Jesus asked in verse 36. Jesus changes the question. "Who do I act like a neighbor toward?" Do you see the reorientation that Jesus demands in our thinking. We think like this, "Okay, who is my neighbor?" Jesus is asking to whom are you acting like a neighbor? **Loving your**

neighbor as yourself is not about defining who is your neighbor. Loving your neighbor as yourself is about being a neighbor to everyone, even people you would avoid. Who will you love as yourself?

Who will you show the love of Christ toward? The parable shows the breaking down of "neighbor boundaries." It is the Samaritan who helps the Jew in the story, not the priest or the Levite. Being a neighbor breaks through ethnic and racial lines. That is what this parable is teaching. There are two different races: Jews and Samaritans. They hate each other. But being a neighbor breaks through racial lines. Being a neighbor breaks through religious lines. Being a neighbor breaks through economic lines. Being a neighbor breaks through moral lines. We think there are people that we do not have love as ourselves because they are immoral, or too poor, or too rich, or have a different set of beliefs, or don't believe in God, or are Muslims, or look different than us. The parable is teaching us that there are no boundaries to whom we are to act as a neighbor. There are no limits to who we are to love as ourselves. We are to be the neighbor to everyone.

How do we be a neighbor? Jesus asked in verse 36, "Who proved to be the neighbor?" The answer is found in verse 37, "The one who showed him mercy." This is how we are a neighbor. We show mercy without boundaries. We do what is good and right to everyone. We show mercy even when mercy is not shown to us. We do not retaliate. We do not treat people as they treat us. We show mercy when we are not treated right. The greatest way we show this mercy is by teaching others the gospel. Tell people about Jesus and show them the mercy of God. Who proved to be the neighbor? The one who showed mercy. Jesus then commands, "You go and do likewise."

Conclusion

Jesus has answered the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" You have not done what God demands. Jesus says that we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Further, we are to be a neighbor to everyone, showing mercy, loving them as ourselves. We have failed. We need a Savior if we are going to inherit eternal life because we have come up short of his righteous demands. But that does not mean the requirement has been erased. Jesus commanded this lawyer to still go and do likewise. We do not throw up our hands and say we have failed. If you want to inherit eternal life we must love the Lord with all our heart and love our neighbor as ourselves. When we fall short then we humbly beg for God's mercy and forgiveness. The blood of Christ bridges our failures and brings us into eternal life. But some of us are not even trying. We are living for self, justifying ourselves, and making excuses for why we do not worship, study, serve, and obey as we ought. Our lives must reveal our love for God.

We are in a section of Luke's gospel where Luke is teaching his readers about discipleship. Last week we noticed that true disciples love the Lord with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind and act like a neighbor toward everyone without limits. In the midst of Luke's series on discipleship we come across a short story about a family argument. Initially this story may seem out of place. Why do the scriptures record a disagreement between Mary and Martha. Doesn't this seem like a personal story? But there is a purpose for Luke including this story in his orderly narrative to Theophilus. Let's look at the story and see what the Holy Spirit through Luke is revealing to us.

Setting The Scene

We need to set the scene to this story. Jesus has entered a village. A woman named Martha welcomed Jesus into her house. Now consider for a moment the pressure that Martha is under. Imagine having Jesus come over to your house. Some of you understand this pressure to a degree. When you are having the preachers over to your house for a meal, you want everything to be perfect. You make sure that the house is clean. You make sure the guests are comfortable. You make sure that the meal is prepared and can be served on time. You want everything to be perfect and there is a lot of work to do to make sure that the evening goes just right. This is a big day. I would imagine that Martha and Mary had a plan. When I have gone on meetings I have seen families come together to make sure the preparations are made. I would suppose that Mary and Martha had worked out a deal where Mary was going to help Martha get everything set for this important moment when Jesus came into Martha's house.

Now the scene becomes interesting. Martha is running around the house trying to get everything ready. One can imagine the smoke rising in the kitchen as she is preparing things at a frenzied pace. But where is Mary? Mary is sitting at the feet of the Lord, listening to his teaching. I can see Martha peeking around the corner and resenting the fact that Mary is just sitting there while she is killing herself trying to pull off this meal. You can almost hear the thoughts running through her head. "It would sure be nice to have a little help in here." "Why isn't my lazy sister in here helping me?" "Wish I could be out there listening but someone has to get this meal prepared." Finally, Martha cannot keep it inside any longer. Notice her words in verse 40.

"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." (Luke 10:40 ESV) These are strong words. "Don't you care, Jesus?" Can you imagine saying to Jesus that you do not care about me? Martha is claiming an injustice and sees Jesus as not caring about how she is being mistreated at this moment. "Tell my sister to help me out then!" Martha thinks that Jesus will set Mary straight. Send Mary in here to help me out. There are things that need to be done if we are going to eat!

But Martha gets an unexpected response. Have you noticed that it never works out the person who tries to tell Jesus to tell another person to do something? **But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41-42 ESV)** You know that Martha expected Jesus to say, "Mary, please be a good servant and go help your sister." Instead, Jesus tells Martha that she is wrong and that Mary has made the better choice. In the rest of our lesson we will consider the lessons we learn about discipleship from Martha, Mary, and Jesus.

Differentiating the Urgent From the Important

The problem was not that Mary did not understand what needed to be done. The problem was Martha thought those urgent things were important. She had all of these pressing issues that seemed to be so important but truly were not important. They were urgent but not important. There is an interesting thing that happens between things that are urgent and things that are important. Have you ever noticed that important things never clamor like the urgent things? Urgent things scream in our ear and make our stomachs upset until we do them. But the important things in life quietly remain in the corner, often ignored, never demanding our attention. It is the phone calls, the cleaning of the house, yard work, housework, our jobs and the like that clamor for our attention. We have email, Facebook, Twitter, texting, and the like that all swallow up our attention. Yet none of these things are important. Notice we are not talking about sins. We are merely talking about the urgent things in life that pull us away from the important things in life. To put this point in the context of the story, consider this question: Was Martha sinning? No, she was not sinning. She was just allowing the urgent things of preparing for the Lord's coming for a meal to interfere the important things of spending time with the Lord. This is what happens to us. Our schedules become so overloaded with urgent, non-sinful things that we neglect the important things of life. We spend time with all the things that schedule our lives and do not do the important things that God has told us to do for godly living. We spend time taking care of the house rather than spending time with our family. We spend an extra hour at work rather than spending an extra hour with our spouse.

I want you to notice an important word in verse 40. The word is "distracted." "But Martha was distracted with much serving." Her attention was drawn away from the Lord by the burden of her duties. She had things that had to be done and no one is disputing that at some point the things that Martha was doing would need to be done. But these things were not important. These things are not more important than sitting at the feet of Jesus like Mary was doing.

How often we neglect our Lord Jesus for the urgent things in life. Bible reading is neglected because we have urgent things to do. Prayer is non-existent because we are simply too busy to pray. We neglect the assembling of the Christians together because we have so much to do. Teaching is neglected because we do not have time to spend with our friends and neighbors. It is amazing to me that the fact we have not checked our email can scream louder in our ear than the fact that we have not checked in to the Lord in prayer. It has been hours since we looked at Facebook and we think we are missing out, but we let hours go by without looking at our Bibles and do not even notice.

Putting First Things First

The story is teaching the disciples that we need to redefine what is important. We must carefully determine what things are truly important and what things are simply urgent. Only when we do this will we be able to place the important above the urgent. The urgent screams loudly in our ears. If we do not predetermine that these things are not important, then we will continue to neglect the important things. How do we determine which things in life are important and which things in life are urgent? Jesus teaches us how to sort this out in verses 41-42.

"One thing is necessary." Do we live our lives with this kind of perspective? Martha is anxious and troubled by many things, according to Jesus' divine observation. But only one thing is necessary. There is only one important thing. Mary had chosen that necessary thing. She had chosen to sit at the feet of Jesus. She chose listening to Jesus and Jesus was not going to take that away from her so that she can make a meal or do the dishes. The one necessary thing was to sit at the feet of Jesus. How often we act like this is not a necessary thing. There is only one important thing and I fear that we often do not classify our gathering in worship as important. Studying the word of God together in Bible class and in our assemblies are simply not important to us. Yet we read that the first century Christians devoted

themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship (Acts 2:42). They understood that there was one necessary thing. Too often we treat our gatherings as optional. Mary had chosen the good portion. She had chosen the most important thing. One writer made the point like this:

"Amid all life's duties and necessities there is one supreme necessity which must always be given priority, and which, if circumstances compel us to choose, must be chosen to the exclusion of all others. That supreme necessity is to sit at the Lord's feet and listen to his word. It must be so. If there is a Creator at all, and that Creator is prepared to visit us and speak to us as in his incarnation he visited and spoke to Martha and Mary, then obviously it is our first duty as his creatures, as it ought to be our highest pleasure, to sit at his feet and listen to what he says." (Gooding, *Luke*, 212)

Unfortunately, it seems when circumstances compel us to choose, we choose the urgent to the exclusion of Jesus. We come to services only when there is nothing else. We pray only in circumstances of need. We read only when there is nothing on television. We choose God only if there is no other pressing need. And we think we have proper excuses. "Well, I had to work." "I had to do such and such." "I had people I had to be with." There is only one thing that is necessary. This must be a life changing teaching. True disciples of Jesus are moved by the one necessary thing: to sit at the feet of Jesus. Sitting at the feet of Jesus is the only pressing need! Disciples of Jesus do not let the urgent things of life squeeze out the one important thing: Jesus. Just because it is not a sinful act does not mean it is not a sinful choice.

"We cannot do everything; there is not enough time. Like Mary, therefore, we shall have to choose and choose very deliberately. Life's affairs will not automatically sort themselves into a true order of priorities. If we do not consciously insist on making 'sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to his word' our number one necessity, a thousand and one other things and duties, all claiming to be prior necessities, will tyrannize our time and energies and rob us of the 'good part' in life." (Gooding, *Luke*, 216)

Conclusion

Are we teaching our children to be a Martha or a Mary? Are we teaching them that the urgent things of sports, school, and activities are important? Or are we teaching our children that there is only one important and necessary thing? We get tons of opportunities to teach this to our children. Recently, Halloween was on a Wednesday night. Our kids did not even ask what we were going to do. They knew there is one important thing and it is not getting free candy from houses. We excuse ourselves by saying, "It is only a Wednesday night." It is an opportunity to sit at the feet of Jesus. This year Christmas day falls on Sunday. Will we teach our children there is one important thing or will we push Jesus in the corner and do what we think is urgent? What is your desire? Do you want to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his word? Jesus must be the priority over worldly concerns. Disciples of Jesus live with only one thing as necessary. Nothing in life is important except Jesus.

Luke has been using this section of his gospel to teach us about Christian discipleship. In our last lesson we noticed that Jesus taught that disciples realize there is only one necessary thing — sitting at the feet of Jesus. The scene before us in Luke 11 begins with Jesus praying. When he finished praying, one of the disciples asks Jesus to teach them to pray. John apparently taught this disciples how to pray and now Jesus is going to teach us how to pray. Many of us probably think that we know how to pray. Many of us may not know how to talk to God. Jesus is going to challenge our prayer life as he teaches how true disciples talk to God.

Disciples Pray Pursuing God's Purposes (11:1-2)

Jesus begins by calling God, "Father." Jesus teaches his disciples that prayers do not need to begin with long flowing descriptions. We are instructed to speak intimately with God, speaking with him as our Father. Jesus does not say that only he can call God, "Father," but we are also to God, "Father." Talking to God does not require formalism. My children do not talk to me with Shakespearian English.

Jesus continues by teaching us to pray for the name of God to be kept holy. The NLT does a good job translating this verse. **"Father, may your name be kept holy."** I believe God's words to Ezekiel explains what it means for God's name to be kept holy.

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. 23 And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. (Ezekiel 36:22-23 ESV)

We are praying for the holiness of God to always be revealed. Further, we are reminding ourselves that we keep the name of God holy through our words and through our actions. We cannot exalt the holiness of God in prayer if our daily words and actions do not reveal God's holiness. God told Ezekiel that he was acting on behalf of his holy name because the people of Israel had profaned God's holiness through their actions. They claimed to be the people of God but they did not uphold God's holiness. Disciples uphold the holiness of God through speech and action. We do not use God's name as a curse word. We do not throw the name of God around as if it were a common exclamation. Our words uphold the high holiness of God. Our lives reveal God's holiness not discredit the name of God to the world.

Jesus continues by instructing the disciples to pray for the coming of the kingdom. It is possible that Jesus merely has in view the arrival of Christ's kingdom which would take place in a year or two after speaking these words. But I do not think this is the case simply because this is the disciples asking how to pray. I do not believe that Jesus would teach them how to pray in way that future disciples would come to these words as say that we are not to pray these words because the kingdom already happened. Do not forget that Luke is writing to teach Theophilus in this gospel and writing for future disciples to come. When Luke writes, the kingdom of Christ had already arrived. Yet Luke still writes down our Lord's words to pray for the kingdom to come. There is another aspect of that I believe is in view when Jesus teaches the disciples to pray for the kingdom to come. While the kingdom began in Acts 2 the scriptures teach that Christ must continue to rule in this kingdom until every knee bows and every enemy is destroyed. The apostle Paul states that Christ must rule in this kingdom until he destroys every rule and every authority and power (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). Jesus was not telling his disciples to pray for Acts 2 when the kingdom would arrive. Jesus is teaching to pray for the rule of the kingdom to

come into the world and into the heart of every person. We are praying for all powers and authorities to be subjected to Christ. We are praying for every person to be subjected to Christ. The kingdom has come and the kingdom continues its reign until every enemies of Christ has been subjugated.

Disciples Pray Relying on God's Provisions (11:3-4)

Finally, in verse 3-4 Jesus teaches his disciples to depend on God physically and spiritually. Praying for our daily bread reveals our dependence on God to provide our physical needs. We are recognizing that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. We are acknowledging that our physical blessings are given to us by God. Further, we rely on God for our spiritual protection. Every prayer rightly asks for forgiveness from sins. But our forgiveness is contingent on forgiving others. A disciple readily forgives, not holding grudges or using offenses for selfish manipulation, because God has forgiven us. When we are not readily forgiving those who seek our forgiveness, then we are no longer Christians because God will not forgive us. We are lost in our sins when we do not forgive others when they offend us and seek repentance. Prayer is the way we express our dependence on God. Prayer humbles us so that we accept in our hearts that we need God and understand that we cannot live without him.

Disciples Pray Boldly (11:5-8)

Jesus continues to teach his disciples about how to talk to God by telling a parable. Hospitality was very important in ancient near eastern society. The man has a friend who arrived on a journey and the man has no food to give him. There is not a Walmart or 24 hour convenience store to go get food. It is the middle of the night. The friend says he will not get up and give him anything because the door is shut and the children are in bed with them. We cannot think of our three bedroom home with quiet doors. The house only has one room and the whole family is asleep together. The whole family will wake up if he gets up and open the door. Verse 8 is the point of the parable. The friend will get up, not because they are friends, but because of this man's impudence. Many translations read "persistence" but many scholars point out that persistence is not exactly the point. Regarding the Greek word that the ESV translates "impudence," Bock states, "It is a hard word to translate into English, for it refers to a combination of boldness and shamelessness. Thus, the stress is not on persistence or repetition of the request, as much as it is on the boldness or nerve of the request. This petitioner has gall" (Bock, *BECNT*, 1059). Philip Graham Ryken states the word means the man "acts without any sensibility to shame or disgrace" (Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary*, 585). The ESV Study Bible says it refers to "a lack of sensitivity for what is proper." Thus, the ESV rendering of "impudence" is a good rendering as well as the NIV 2011 rendering, "shameless audacity." Do you see that this is the point of the story? It is not the man's persistence of the request. It is the timing of the request along with the persistence. This man had boldness and gall to make this request at such an hour. The friend in the house gives him the bread because he is such an irritant.

Jesus' point is that disciples pray boldly with shameless nerve. Prayer is the audaciously bold request for God to do what he has promised. This shameless boldness is not for selfish requests. We are not praying for things to fulfill our selfish desires (cf. James 4:3). Further, we see this point in this context. The model prayer does not have room for selfish requests. Rather, we are revealing our complete dependence on God. We are telling God what is happening in our lives and the things that we need spiritually or physically. Go to God in prayer boldly. Ask for great things to happen in your life. You are given the offer to make bold, audacious requests to your Lord. What have you been afraid to ask God to do in your life? Are you struggling with daily food because of economic conditions or physical hardships? God said to pray for that and pray boldly for it. Are you struggling in your faith? God tells you to make audacious prayers for your spiritual life. Are you trying to encourage another brother or sister in Christ?

God says you should pray boldly for them. Are you trying to teach your friends the gospel? Shameless pray for their souls.

God Responds to Prayer as a Father to a Child (11:9-13)

The final paragraph shows how God will respond to such prayers. Verse 9 tells us to ask and keep asking. We are given the invitation to prayer. Seek and keep seeking. Pursue God and his will. Seeking the goals and purposes of the kingdom. Knock and keep knocking. We are entering through the door into God's presence to receive blessing. Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. God answers our bold requests in his name. Notice verse 10. "For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." God provides for his children. This is the illustration that Jesus uses to explain why God answers prayers.

Notice verses 11-12. What father would give a snake to the son who asks for a fish? What father will give his son a scorpion when he asks for an egg? Here is the son who is in physical need. What father is going to give his child something that he does not need? Even more, what father is going to give his child something harmful? No father would do that. The father gives what the child needs and does not give what is harmful to them. Now watch the point in verse 13.

If we are evil people and yet we know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our heavenly Father give us the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! If we know how to give our children what they need when they ask, and we are evil and sinful, then HOW MUCH MORE does our Father in heaven know what to give us? How much more will our heavenly Father do for us? Notice the interchangeable use of "good gifts" and "Holy Spirit" in this text. Matthew 7:11 reads exactly as Luke 11:13 except Matthew says "good gifts" rather than "Holy Spirit." I think this is a very important point that Luke is making. Luke's focus is on the good gifts that were promised through the Holy Spirit. The prophets wrote that the Holy Spirit would be poured out and the imagery signified the restoration of God's kingdom, the restoration of God's fellowship with them, and the restoration of God's blessings to his people. The restoration of God's blessings to his people is in view by Luke. We are given a blank check request for the necessities of the spiritual life. God is going to give you everything you need to get through this life. Ask him boldly for the things you need as you depend on him. God is going to provide for his children. He is not going to give a scorpion when you need an egg. God will give you the Holy Spirit. Do not try to make this mystical and strange. It is a simple promise made repeatedly through the scriptures. God is going to give you his blessings when you ask. What do you truly need right now? Ask God. Shamelessly be persistent in your request to the God who gives you every good gift and perfect blessing for your life.

Sitting On The Fence? Luke 11:14-28

Luke is in the midst of teaching his readers about the discipleship Jesus demands. In this section of scriptures, Luke is going to address the skeptics and uncommitted. Luke wants to ask you a very important question: What will you do with Jesus?

Setting The Scene (11:14-16)

A great event occurs. There was a man who was mute which was caused by a demon. Jesus casts out the demon and the man is now able to speak. This, of course, is a great crowd pleaser as the people marvel and are amazed. Rather than being excited for the man who now is able to speak and rather than learn about Jesus who has cast out this demon there is a sad reaction that happens. Some of the people say that Jesus cast out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons. Essentially, some of the people are saying that Jesus is using the power of Satan to cast out demons. Their claim is that Jesus is not using the power of God. Here is one group of people who outright reject Jesus in the face of the signs. There is a second group who refused to make a decision and continue to want to see more signs.

There is an important point that cannot be overlooked at this moment. Notice that no one is denying the miracle. No one is saying that he did not really cast out a demon. No one is claiming that Jesus did not do a miracle. No one is suggesting that this man was not healed. No one can doubt the miracle. The issue is that some people wanted to see more miracles and some people said that Jesus was deriving his power from Satan. No one ever denied the miracles of Jesus. So Jesus is going to make a four-fold argument to disprove their arguments.

Jesus' Argument For Himself (11:17-22)

(1) "I cannot be casting out demons by demonic power because Satan would be fighting against himself and his kingdom would not survive" (11:17-18). Jesus' first point is that their argument is absurd. How can Jesus be using the power of Satan to break the power of Satan? What sense does that make? Every kingdom that is divided against itself is laid waste. Why would Satan try to undo his own work? It is unreasonable for people to say that this miracle came from Satan's power. You know this unreasonable thinking has not changed. Rather than accepting the power of God in the world around us, people will attribute the power in this world to random chance. Rather than look around and accept the power of God people accept an unreasonable argument that life came from nothing. Think about how unreasonable this argument for the origin of the universe is. When is the last time you saw something come from nothing? When is the last time you saw an explosion bring order and life to the world? Explosions bring disorder and death! Rather than accept the power of God people will believe in unreasonable arguments for the power we see in this world.

(2) "Since I am not driving out demons by the power of Satan, then it must be by God's power" (11:19). Verse 19 is an interesting argument. Jesus asks, "By whom do your sons cast them [the demons] out?" There are a couple of ways to understand the point Jesus is making. We know historically that there were Jewish exorcists. We do not know if they were effective or not. If this is what Jesus is talking about, then Jesus point is simply that they do not claim these exorcists to be from Satan. Therefore it is inconsistent to say that Jesus casts out demons by Satan's power. But I do not think this is the point. Remember in Luke 10:17 we saw Jesus appoint the 72 to go to the villages proclaiming the kingdom and casting out demons. I think Jesus has the 72 including the apostles in view. Your own people are casting out demons and you do not claim that they are casting demons by Satan's power. How can you claim that I am casting out demons by Satan's power? When the New Testament speaks of

“your sons” it does not always refer to actually children by birth but can also refer to the whole generation. Jesus’ 72 disciples are Jews just like them but they do not say that they are casting out demons by Satan. The 72 are casting out demons by the power of God and so is Jesus.

(3) “If I am driving out demons by God’s power, then the kingdom of God has come” (11:20). The prophets declared that when the unclean spirits were cast out of the land that this would be a sign of the arrival of God’s kingdom. **“It will come about in that day, declares the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land.” (Zechariah 13:2 NASB)** Jesus uses a very vivid image to describe the work he is doing. He calls it, “the finger of God.” Jesus claims to be casting out demons by the finger of God. This has a powerful reference to the exodus. During the miracle of the plagues, listen to what the Egyptians had to say about those powerful miracles. **“Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’ But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.” (Exodus 8:19 ESV)** This is a bold statement. Jesus is operating by the finger of God, that is, the very power of God. The only other time we read the phrase, “the finger of God,” is when God wrote the ten commandments on two stone tablets. The power of God is on display in Jesus showing the arrival of the promised kingdom.

(4) “If the kingdom has come because I have come, then I must be the promised Messiah King” (11:21-23). The implication is that if the kingdom has come because of his arrival, then Jesus is the king of this kingdom. The story that Jesus tells proves this point. Jesus describes himself as one stronger than the strong man. Satan is the strong man. Jesus is the stronger one who attacks him and overcomes him. He takes away his armor and divides his spoil. This is an explanation of what Jesus is doing. By casting out demons, Jesus is showing that he is the stronger man who is attacking Satan, overcoming him, and dividing the spoil. Jesus is stripping Satan of his power. He is the king who has arrived in his kingdom. He is the promised Messiah.

Jesus wants his audience to understand that Satan’s strength has been overcome. Paul could joyfully proclaim, **“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:54-57 ESV).** Praise God that there is someone stronger than Satan. We are not stronger than Satan. We are enslaved to sin. We are in bondage to Satan.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Hebrews 2:14–15 ESV)

When Paul recounts his conversion experience to King Agrippa, listen to what Paul says the Lord told him.

“And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’” (Acts 26:15–18 ESV) Satan has been utterly overwhelmed by the power of Jesus.

There Is No Middle Ground (11:23-28)

Now, we need to come back and find the point of Jesus speaking about these things. Remember the scene. There are people who are claiming that Jesus is casting out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus has dealt with this foolish and unreasonable thinking. But do not forget that there was a second group. The second group wants to see another sign. They are unwilling to make a commitment. They do not say that Jesus is working by Satan's power. But they want to keep testing Jesus and want to see more miracles. Notice how Jesus turns on this group in verse 23.

“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”

It is popular today to sit on the fence and be non-committal. The world wants us to be accepting of all opinions. Jesus wants us to understand something. If you are not with him completely, then you are against him. You cannot sit on the fence when it comes to Jesus. You cannot say you want to wait longer before you make a decision. You are in a dangerous position. You are not with the Messiah. You are not with the king. You are still spending time with the strong man who has already been overcome and subdued Jesus. You are choosing the losing side. Jesus now tells a parable to reveal the danger of the person who sits on the fence in verses 24-26.

I do not believe that Jesus is teaching random information about demons. We must consider that there is an important point being made when Jesus speaks about this demon who is cast out and then returns with seven more spirits. The point is that there is no neutrality with Jesus. Bock states the image well: “The picture is of a person who has experienced a great act of God, but has not responded to it, since the occupied house is left empty. The person has learned nothing and is still subject to the same demonic influence. The tragedy is that, by not responding, the opportunity for a permanent reversal is lost. Failure to have God enter in has left the person in peril” (*Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 1093). If you continue to sit on the fence and not fully commit your life to him, then you are being given over to Satan and his power and your condition is worse than the first. If you are not committed to Jesus your life is going to be a spiritual wreck. There is a void in your life and if it is not filled by Jesus, then it is going to be filled with all kinds of evil and wickedness. We are not with Christ if there has been no life change. We are still stubborn and resistant to becoming his disciple. We may think that we are with him. But we are just like these people in the text who are sitting around testing Jesus, looking for another sign. If our lives are not guided by the Spirit then our lives are guided by Satan. We must be completely regenerated to Jesus otherwise we are degenerating back into the ways of Satan.

Notice how Luke ties this picture together. A woman in the crowd shouts, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” (11:27). Look at Jesus' response in verse 28: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” These people were seeing the miracles and hearing the teachings of Jesus. Blessed are those who do not sit on the fence. Blessed are those who look at the life of Jesus, hear his teachings, and keep his words. Jesus is looking for people who will give their lives fully to Jesus. If you do not wholeheartedly follow the Lord, the end is worse than the first. You are going to fall back into sin and you are going to have a stubborn heart develop. If you are sitting on the fence you must recognize that you are not sitting where you think you are sitting. If you are not fully with Jesus, then you are against him. Sitting on the fence means that you are still sitting with the defeated Satan. You have chosen to play for the losing team. The longer you sit on the fence in Satan's camp, the more likely you are going to stay there and never give your life completely to Jesus. You will be like these people who see the miracles and never follow. You will hear God's word but never obey. Your soul is lost and your doom is sealed. Jesus has conquered sin and Satan. Jesus has proven through his miracles, which could not be denied, that he is the Lord. No longer sit with Satan. Stop sitting on the fence and obey your Lord today. What will you do with Jesus?

The Sign You Need Luke 11:29-36

Our world and our generation is not very different from theirs in the first century. Everyone today wants a sign also. Everyone wants to have a special experience. People are looking for a feeling. People want to have something unique happen to them to set them above others. Some time back faith healers were very popular and would call for people to look for a sign and ask for a sign. Today people claim to listen to signs from the Holy Spirit to confirm their faith or salvation. Everyone wants to have a sign today and people in Jesus' day were also clamoring for a sign.

In our last lesson we saw Jesus target the people in the crowd who were sitting on the fence. Jesus had cast out a demon from a man who was mute. The man is now talking and part of the crowd rejected Jesus by saying he casting out demons by the power of Satan. The other part of the crowd refused to commit to follow Jesus and accepting him as the Son of God. They wanted to see another sign. Rather than receiving the sign, accepting Jesus as the Messiah, and committing to following Jesus, they want another sign so that they can find a reason to reject Jesus. Jesus going to explain the sign that he give and explain why the people are not becoming his disciples.

The Sign You Need (11:29-30)

Jesus observes that the crowds are increasing. Rather than encourage the crowds or marvel at the crowds that are following him, Jesus says, "This generation is an evil generation." Can you imagine a bunch of unbelievers following Jesus and rather than approving of them following him, Jesus calls them out. As we noted in the last lesson, Jesus is not interested people having a mild interest in him. Disciples are people who fully commit to following Jesus. Jesus explains why he is critical of this generation. He says that they are always seeking a sign. One sign is never enough. Jesus healing the blind, healing the sick, and raising the dead but the people do not want to commit to following Jesus. They just want another sign. Jesus declares that no additional signs will be given. There is only one sign that is needed. There is one great sign yet to come: the sign of Jonah.

Jesus says that Jonah was a sign to the people of Ninevah. We need to consider how Jonah was a sign to the people of Ninevah. What was it about Jonah's life that became a sign to the wicked people of Ninevah? Without question, the sign was that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish. Rather than dying, a miracle occurs. Jonah survives being swallowed by the fish then goes to Ninevah and preaches to the people. Jonah should have died. He was thrown overboard during a violent storm and sinks all the way to the seafloor, according to Jonah 2. Then Jonah is swallowed by a fish. Common scientific thinking would say we have a dead Jonah. Instead, three days later Jonah is spit up from the fish on to the land and he goes and preaches to the city of Ninevah. That miraculous event is the sign. Jesus is explaining that he is going to give a sign to that generation that is sign of Jonah. The implication, which is clearly expressed in Matthew's account, is that he is going to be miraculously raised from the dead. A resurrection miracle is going to occur. This was the one sign for the people to know that Jesus is truly God, the Savior of the world.

The Resurrection

The resurrection has come under heavy fire over the past couple hundred years. It is understandable why this would happen. If there is no resurrection, then Jesus has not given the world "the sign of Jonah" that proves him to be God. To feel the weight of what Jesus is teaching about his coming resurrection, it is useful for us to prove that the resurrection did occur. When we come to the resurrection story at the end of Luke's gospel we will explore the theological significance of the resurrection. So this is

an appropriate time explore the historical fact that Jesus rose from the dead so that we can appreciate the teaching Jesus is giving concerning “the sign of Jonah.” There are many pieces of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus that must be dealt with by every critic.

(1) Eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus. The scriptures record a number of eyewitnesses to the risen Jesus. From the apostles, to the women who went to the tomb, to the men on the road to Emmaus, to the five hundred who saw him at one time, the eyewitness evidence is overwhelming. It is not like there are only twelve people who saw Jesus risen from the dead. I would like to give you another piece of evidence to bolster our faith in the eyewitness observation of Jesus. Acts 1:22 records that one of the qualifications of being an apostle of the Lord was that he was a witness to the resurrection of Jesus. When that is stated as the apostles look to replace Judas, they do not look at each other and suggest that this is an impossible feat. It is not like saying you are a Christian if you have gone to the moon, therefore ruling out everyone. There were people who saw the risen Lord. The difficult qualification was that the person was a disciple from the beginning of John’s baptism all the way to the resurrection. That is what made the qualification very narrow. But there are men, like Matthias and Joseph, who we do not read about seeing the risen Lord but meeting the qualification. There are hundreds and hundreds of eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus.

(2) The empty tomb. The fact that anyone in Jerusalem could go to the tomb and see it empty is an immense piece of evidence. If the tomb was not empty, the Jewish opposition would have gone to the tomb and produced the body. The opposition in fact proves the empty tomb because the guards are instructed to claim that the body was stolen. Why claim this except that the tomb was truly empty!

(3) Enemies became disciples. Paul was killing and persecuting Christians because he believed that Jesus was an impostor and not the Messiah. What changed Paul to become a disciple of Jesus who gave his life for Jesus? Paul saw the risen Lord. The brothers of Jesus did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. In Acts and Galatians we read about James the brother of Jesus as a pillar in Christ’s church. We have a letter in our Bibles written by Jude the brother of Jesus. What changed them from not believing to believing? They saw the risen Lord. The resurrection is the defining proof that Jesus is the Son of God.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.... (Romans 1:1–4 ESV) The apostle Paul declares the resurrection proved with power that Jesus is the Son of God.

Do You See The Sign? (11:31-32)

Let’s return to our text in Luke and see the point that Jesus is making to the crowd about his coming death and resurrection as the sign of Jonah. Notice the first point Jesus makes in verse 31. When the wisdom of Solomon was being proclaimed, what did the queen of the South do? She came from far away to listen to the wisdom of Solomon. She was willing to travel to the ends of the earth to hear God’s wisdom through Solomon. The queen of the south can condemn that generation because they are unwilling to hear with open hearts the teachings of Jesus, and Jesus is greater than Solomon!

The second point is in verse 32. When Jonah preached to the people of Ninevah to repent, they did it. The people of Ninevah were wicked Gentiles and yet they repented at the preaching of God’s word. Jesus has come preaching to his own people and they will not repent. Therefore, the people of Ninevah will condemn this generation on the day of judgment because they repented at the hearing of God’s word, and Jesus is far greater than Jonah!

Jesus has identified two common problems. We will not go to hear God's word and we will not listen and repent at the hearing of God's word. This is Jesus' condemnation of the time he lived in and is still the problem today. God has revealed himself through his word. We can know his will for our lives and what his requirements are for eternal life. We can know what behavior is not pleasing to God. Yet we do not want to know. We will not give the effort to seek the time to hear the declaration of God's word. It is not about being part of the crowd. It is not about just coming to church. We think we have other things we have to do. Remember that Luke is teaching his readers who are disciples of Jesus. Disciples are those seek to hear the word of the Lord and, upon hearing God's word, change their lives to agree with God's word.

Why We Don't See (11:33-36)

Jesus explains why we do not see the sign. The reason we sit on the fence and refuse to commit to Jesus is not because there is insufficient evidence. It is not because the evidence is not convincing. Jesus says the problem lies within us. The fault is not with Jesus. He is the light that has been put on a stand so that everyone can see the light. The light of Jesus is shining. The resurrection is the shining light to us. His glory is not hidden in the shadows. What Jesus did is not a secret. When your eyes are healthy, you see the light and your whole body is full of light. However, when your eyes are bad then your body is full of darkness. The problem is not that we do not have enough light. If there is light, but we cannot see, the answer is that we have bad eyes. The problem is not with the light. This is Jesus' point. The light is shining. Jesus is the light. He is not the problem. The problem is that we cannot see because our hearts are still in the darkness. Bad, dim eyes cause our lives to remain in the darkness. Good eyes (that is, good hearts) allow light to enter into the body. Bad eyes (that is, wicked hearts) block light from entering the body. The eyes of our soul need to be clear to receive and commit to Jesus.

Friends, Jesus told us that the problem is with us. The problem is not in the source of the light. The problem is not Jesus. The problem is not in the church. The problem is not in the teaching of God's word. The problem is with us. We cannot blame others for why we are not strong Christians. We cannot point the finger to someone else to excuse ourselves for our lack of dedication, zeal, and love for the Lord. Jesus taught us that to inherit eternal life we must love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength. We have no one to blame for not doing that but ourselves. We must look within and consider what is blocking the light of Jesus from entering our eyes. Why is the power of Jesus' death and resurrection not moving us to love the Lord and serve him? What is interfering with our focused commitment to following Jesus?

Verse 35 gives us the warning: "Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness." Be careful that you do not think you have the light when you are actually living in darkness. We can think we are in the light when our hearts are darkened. So many in the world, including ourselves, believe that we are in the light. Jesus is warning us to look again. What we think is light can actually be darkness.

If there is darkness in our spiritual lives, it is never the fault of the light of the gospel. The light of Jesus and the light of the gospel shines in full glory. It is our sins that block us from seeing the light of the gospel. The greatest sign has been given. It is the only sign you need. Jesus rose from the dead. What will you do with that miracle? Will the resurrection of Jesus be the basis of your life change, allowing the light of the Lord to remove the darkness in our hearts? Will we seek the light and remove the darkness of sin from our lives to be a disciple of Jesus? We do not need another sign. We need the spiritual ability to see the sign that has already been given to us. Jesus, the Son of God, was crucified for sinners and raised again in power. Are we giving all effort to hear God's word and change when we hear it? We have the great sign of the resurrection. The question is: why don't you see?

What does your life look like on the inside? What is happening inside of you? Are you real? Is what people see the true you? Or is there the true you and then the you that you let people see? I think this is one of the issues that we face today. We are so connected and have so many social friends, but there is not one person who really knows us. So we feel alone even though we have this seeming circle of friends. Jesus is going to look into this problem and help us find the solution to this difficulty.

The Scene (11:37-38)

Jesus was still teaching and a Pharisee invites him to dinner. So Jesus goes with this Pharisee for dinner. Remember that the Pharisees are a group of respected religious leaders in Judaism in Jesus' day. They were a select group who held strongly to the oral traditions passed down from their forefathers. Jesus goes with the Pharisee and sits at the table. The Pharisee is utterly shocked because Jesus did not first wash his hands. This shock is not coming from hygiene. The Pharisees is not having a problem because he knows about bacteria and viruses and the need to wash hands before putting one's hands in one's mouth. The issue is about ceremonial cleanliness. Listen to the tradition that the Pharisees had, as recorded in *Yadayim* 2.3.

"The hands are susceptible to uncleanness, and they are rendered clean up to the wrist. Thus if a man had poured the first water up to the wrist and the second water beyond the wrist, the water flowed back to the hand, the hand becomes clean; but if he poured both the first water and the second beyond the wrist, and the water flowed back to the hand, the hand remains unclean. If he poured the first water over the one hand alone and then bethought himself and poured the second water over the one hand, his one hand is clean. If he had poured the water over the one hand and rubbed it on the other, it becomes unclean; but if he rubbed it on his head or on the wall it remains clean."

Are you not glad that we do not live under such a religious system? These are human rules that are not found in the scriptures. But people like to make rules to generate conformity. Jesus did not do this and did not subscribe to any human rules. Jesus enters the house and sits down at the table. You can imagine the Pharisees are over here doing this water routine and Jesus is watching and waiting on them. The Pharisee is shocked. Jesus recognizes the Pharisee's shock and now uses this moment as an opportunity.

The Teaching (11:39-41)

Jesus addresses the issue. The Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but are full of greed and wickedness inside. This is a fairly disgusting image. A dirty cup on the inside is not useable. I'm not thrilled with dirty on the outside of the cup, but if it does not affect where I put my mouth it is not a big concern. But a cup that is dirty on the inside becomes a useless cup. No one washes dishes and cleans only the outside of the cup. There was a time, kids, when we did not have dishwashers. Well, we had dishwashers and they were called children. My mother and my grandmother's house did not have a dishwasher so we washed them by hand. Do you know how to clean the cup? Where do you start? You start on the inside of the cup. You took the rag or sponge full of soapy water, and you cleaned the inside of the cup. Then we would clean the rim of the cup where people had put their mouths. Finally, we would clean the outside of the cup and then rinse the cup out. No one cleaned the outside of the cup first and then acted like the cup was clean. But this is what these religious people are doing. They are not starting with the inside, that is, the heart. They are only concerned about ceremonial, external defilements. However, God made the internal and the external and both count before the Lord. Jesus

says that the problem is the Pharisees is that they are so concerned with these external acts to make sure they are not defiled or unclean on the hands, but do not care that they are defiled and unclean in the heart! You are worried about outward purity but give no concern to inward purity. In verse 41 Jesus makes the point very clear. Pay attention to your heart to find purity. Give from your heart. Generosity of heart will clean the inside of the cup completely. But Jesus does not leave the teaching here. He knows that we will justify ourselves and act like our hearts are clean. So Jesus is going to expose our hearts. Jesus is going to expose us from the inside out so that we can see who we truly are.

Your Cup Is Not Clean When... (11:42-54)

We are more concerned about the rules I think are important than what is important to God (11:42). The Pharisees were keeping commands. They are tithing and with meticulous accuracy. But they are not obeying with a love for God or a love for what is right. They had lost the joy of giving in their tithing. They were keeping God's laws in some areas but were ignoring the other commands of God. Where was the precision in keeping the rest of God's laws? They were so concerned about certain commands but not all of the commands of God. They neglected justice and the love of God. How easy it is for us to pay attention to the commands we want to keep but ignore the commands we do not like! We will not steal but we will live with our boyfriend or girlfriend. We will be honest and truthful but we will cheat on our spouse. We will obey the command to assemble together but ignore the command for self-control. We will do good to others but we will ignore the command that marriage is for life and we will divorce our spouse. Churches will make sure that there are prayers, songs, and the Lord's Supper but ignore the world and not show them the love of Christ. They will not make sure that they understand what is happening so they also can glorify God, as 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 commands. How often major at the things we are good at keeping and ignore the commands that do not appeal to us or the commands we simply do not want to keep! True disciples are concerned about all of God's laws.

We love to be seen (11:43). Too often we act because we want others to know that we are doing something for the Lord. We are seeking attention and craving for people to recognize our spiritual accomplishments. We want people to know what we are doing for the Lord. The Pharisees wanted to be seen as pious and holy. They wanted people to know that they were doing good works. They would make sure people could tell they were fasting. They would make sure people knew they were giving. The attention must always be placed on Jesus and not on us. Sometimes we will think, "But no one knows what I am doing for the Lord!" Good! Don't tell people what you are doing. Jesus said in Matthew 6:2 that if you let people know what you are doing, then you have received your reward. You have not obeyed for the love of the Lord but you want people to know what kind of Christian you are. Don't tell me what you are doing. Don't go up to others and tell them what you are doing. Just do it and do it quietly. True disciples keep the focus on Jesus and do not want attention for the good they are doing in the kingdom.

We are spiritually dead inside and are defiling others because of it (11:44). In Numbers 19:16 the Law of Moses records that touching a grave or dead body made one unclean for seven days. The Jewish leaders decided to mark and whitewash so that people would see the grave and not become defiled. We see the imagery that Jesus is using in his teaching. You are like unmarked graves. People who come in contact with you become defiled because you are spiritually dead. You are a corrupting influence. You are not helping people spiritually (you might think you are) but you are defiling them because the inside of your cup is unclean. We do this when we leave a poor example. When we act selfishly we are corrupting others. When we do not speak and act toward each other with love and godliness we are defiling others with our rottenness. When we lack a zeal for the Lord, we are a corrupting influence. When we do not grow in our knowledge of the scriptures, we are defiling others by

our ignorance of God. We believe things that are not in the Bible and teach things that are not in the Bible. We spout off things like, "God helps those who help themselves" which is not only not in the scriptures but is the opposite of what the scriptures teach. What misery is coming upon those of us who are dead inside and, worse, defile others with our filthiness!

Verse 45 is terrific. As Jesus is pronouncing these woes on the Pharisees, one of the lawyers at this dinner asks Jesus, "Don't you know that you are insulting us when you say these things?" Jesus' response is great because he turns to the lawyers and starts pronouncing woes on them! Basically, Jesus is saying, "I know." If we sit back and are offended by these words then we do not understand at all what we are supposed to be learning. Jesus is revealing our hypocritical lives. Jesus is exposing the filth that is in our hearts. If our only reaction is that we are getting our feelings hurt and are being insulted, then you just have revealed that you are the one Jesus is talking about. You are exposing your external religion and lack of inward purity.

We burden others, but not ourselves (11:46). We are good at this. We tell other people all the things that they ought to be doing, but are unwilling to do it ourselves. This happens all the time. People will complain, "Why doesn't the church do this?" "Why don't the shepherds do this and that?" "Why doesn't the preacher do this and so?" Jesus answers your question with his own question: "Why don't you do it?" Stop putting burdens on others and you pick up the burden. I know there is so much that needs to be done. I could use a little help here. You do it! Stop telling other people your good ideas and just do them. Anytime a person comes up to me with a good idea of something we should do, my response will always be, "It is a good idea, so why don't you do it?" Please consider: just because something sounds like a good idea for you and your life doesn't mean it is good for other people. Do not assume that others are slacking. Assume they are busy doing the work and it is time for you to be busy doing the work as well. We want your good ideas. But more importantly, we need you to execute your good ideas. If you are unwilling to spearhead the work, then it must not be as important and necessary as you think. True disciples think of the work they can do and do not think of the work others can do.

We honor the people we are ignoring (11:47-51). The people in that generation were honoring the prophets by building tombs for them. They were doing memorials for these prophets of God who had been killed by previous generation. Yet the people were not listening to the prophets' message, doing the very thing those who killed the prophets had done. Jesus' point is simply this: your ancestors killed the prophets and you make sure they stay dead because you do not listen to them either. They were dishonoring the prophets by the lives they led while outwardly showing reverence for the prophets. We can have the same rejecting spirit. We dishonor the apostles and prophets by continuing to practice sin in our lives while coming here and acting like we honor God's holy word. If you truly honor God's holy word then you will do what he says. You will put away your sinful activity. You will stop sleeping around. You will stop living with your boyfriend and girlfriend. You will stop divorcing and remarrying. You will stop cheating on your spouse. You will stop engaging in wickedness. Stop pretending that you love God when you are ignoring what God plainly told you to do. True disciples honor God by honoring his word.

We fail to be a light in this world (11:52). These religious leaders were supposed to be leading people to the Lord. They were supposed to be teaching God's word to the people. They were given the key to knowledge. They were given the tools to reveal God to the world. Not only did they not enter into God's kingdom, they prevented others from entering also. We are supposed to be leading people to salvation. We have been given the very words of God with the purpose of teaching people God's will. We are taking away the key to knowledge also when we refuse to enter because of our hypocrisy and then block others from learning because our own defilements. Our cup is full of wickedness and so we fail to share the knowledge of God with others. We confuse people because our lives do not match up with what we are teaching. Woe to us if we do not teach the word of God to people. We have failed if

we do not open God's word and learn from his word. We have failed if we do not share the good news but bury the key to knowledge. The true disciple never forgets his mission to seek and save the lost.

Conclusion

What will you do with these woes? Jesus' words had no effect on the scribes and Pharisees (11:53-54). They began to test him and provoke him to try to discredit Jesus. But Jesus' teaching is true even if we do not like hear it. What is inside your cup? The reason we feel alone and secluded is because we are living two lives. We are pretending to be Christians on the outside, but the inside is full of evil. We need to be cleansed from the inside out. You cannot draw near to God until you give God your heart for cleansing.

Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22)

Unafraid and Unashamed
Luke 12:1-12

What do you fear as a Christian? Are there things about being a disciple of Jesus that causes you anxiety, worry, or fear? One of the fears that we often face is the reaction of other people. When we declare ourselves to be Christians, sometimes there are repercussions for that confession. Jesus is going to address our fears while continuing to speak about the need for cleaning our lives from the inside out.

A Heart Free From Hypocrisy (12:1-3)

Jesus has thousands who are gathering to hear Jesus. The throng of people is so great that they are trampling one another. As this massive crowd is pressing in, Jesus continues to teach his disciples. Jesus warns them about hypocrisy. We should find it interesting to note that Jesus describes hypocrisy as leaven. The unique feature of leaven is that a very little bit will spread through the whole lump of dough. Hypocrisy spreads like a contagion. Having an outward appearance of godliness but being full of sinfulness inwardly is like a disease and this is why Jesus continues to issue such strong warnings. Let us not forget the other issue that Jesus identified with the Pharisees as part of their hypocritical nature. Not only were they full of sins on the inside while trying to maintain an outward veneer of holiness, they also lacked the heart and love for God. Notice it again in Luke 11:42. They neglected "justice and the love of God." In Luke 11:41 Jesus told them that their generosity must come from the heart, not as a mere external action.

I fear that Jesus would have the same condemnation for Christians today. We need to hear these words about our hypocrisy also. It is so easy and tempting for us to elevate obedience to the laws of God to such a point that we ignore the heart and motive behind the obedience that God commands. God never commanded his people to keep the rules. God never asked for the people to just make sure they do what God says. Why do we boil down God's law to such a checklist? God wants our hearts that lead to our obedience. God wants us to see his love, mercy, and grace that will lead us to love him and obey him. God has always commanded for a grace-driven obedience. Worse, not only do we take God's commands and make them a bunch of rules, we add to God's laws and have a bunch of rules that are not found in the scriptures. This is exactly what the Pharisees had done. In thinking that they were helping the people obey God, they had their traditions and rules that had to be kept so that people were considered defiled, sinful, or liberal for breaking the traditions. How true it could be said of us as Jesus said to the religious leaders then that we are straining the gnat and swallowing the camel (Matthew 23:24)!

This danger is grave because hypocrisy spreads like leaven. Left alone this contagion will spread such that people will think Christianity is rule-keeping. People will sing because God commanded it, but will not sing from the heart and with the words pricking the heart. We will pray but we will not pray words from our hearts. We will just offer form prayers with words that we have heard others say. We will partake of the Lord's Supper, but we will not be moved in the heart as we remember the death of the Lord. We will just be eating funny flat bread and slinging back some grape juice. We will not have the zeal to see souls saved, but will just be concerned about keeping our decorum. We will not be moved in the heart for fear of what others may think. Twice Jesus said to go and learn what this means, **"I desire mercy, and not sacrifice"** (cf. Matthew 9:13; 12:7). Have we learned what these words mean? It means that God wants your heart. If your heart is not in your action, then your action is worthless. The prophet Malachi spoke of this problem as the people were obedient to the Lord, bringing their sacrifices. But they considered their obedience a burden and a weariness. It had become heartless religion rather than grace-driven obedience. God's response was their condemnation. I am scared for us, brethren, that in

our effort to impress upon people the need to do as God says (which is right and we must teach) we have completely forgotten the reason and the motive for obedience. Without zeal, love, devotion, enthusiasm, eagerness, intensity, and fervor our “acts of righteousness” are void.

Jesus declares that the day will come when our hypocrisy will be revealed. Jesus says in verse 2 that there is nothing that we cover up which will not be revealed. Our secrets will be brought to the light. Our hypocrisy will not be concealed forever. We need to constantly examine ourselves. Are the rules that we are keeping God’s rules or our own traditions and rules? Are we keeping God’s rules because we are filled with the love of the Lord or because we have turned worship into heartless religion? How can we fight this hypocrisy? Jesus is going to instruct his disciples in the following verses.

Fear God, Not People (12:4-5)

Jesus is telling his disciples not to be afraid of these religious leaders. The Pharisees, lawyers, and Sadducees had the power to make the disciples’ lives miserable and even to kill them. These were the ones who had Jesus killed and had a significant number of the early church persecuted and killed. Jesus says that we must not fear people who can harm the body. So what if people rebuke you, mock you, or scorn you! I love what Jesus says. Jesus says that the worst thing they can do to you is kill you. No big deal, right? To us, we might think it is a big deal, but it isn’t because they cannot harm your soul. Don’t fear what people can say and do. Fear God who has the authority to cast your soul into hell! What matters is what God can do to us.

Only God has true authority. The only fear that should control our lives is the fear of God. Being a people pleaser is not being a Christian. Be a God-pleaser! Christians are too easily frightened away from doing what is right because of people’s opinions. Peter had this very problem. Remember when he was eating with the Gentile Christians but when the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem came, he stopped eating with the Gentile Christians for fear of what they would say? We do the same thing. Too often we do not do what is lawful for us to do as Christians or as a church because we fear what other Christians would think. We are afraid what other churches might say about us. We fear what other preachers might do to us. Preachers and shepherds are very susceptible to this fear. None of us want to be thought of as an outsider. None of us want to be pulled aside and chastised or rebuked. We cannot fear what others think. We cannot be concerned that what we are doing is not done other places. We cannot be fearful because we do something that we have never done before. We must fear God who will cast our souls into hell for not doing what we should have done because we were paralyzed by fear. We must not hold to tradition out of fear. Through grace-driven obedience we must keep God’s laws alone, even if that means retribution.

Fearing God Without Hypocrisy Means God Knows You and Cares About You (12:6-7)

God cares for you. Jesus tells us these words so that we can avoid being cast in hell. God is not trying to cause our mocking and suffering. But we need to clearly understand that pleasing God is not the most important thing, it is the ONLY THING! Notice the picture that Jesus gives. A sparrow was the cheapest thing in the marketplace. Five sparrows could be purchased for two pennies. Even though their value is so low, they are not forgotten by God. God’s people are way more valuable than birds. God will not forget us. God cares about us. God knows what is happening in your life. I love the metaphor that Jesus uses about knowing the hairs on our heads. Knowing the hairs on our heads is not pertinent information. The point is that our Lord absolutely knows what is happening to us. He knows what you are going through. God knows who you are and cares about you. Do not succumb to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Do not succumb to the fear of people or other Christians. The Lord knows those who are his.

Stand Up For Jesus Now (Not Traditions), and Jesus Will Stand Up For You Later (12:8-12)

To acknowledge Jesus before people is to be open and honest about our total life commitment to him. We must live our lives completely for Jesus. We do not live our lives for the opinions of others. We do not live our lives to keep the critics at bay. We live for Jesus regardless of the consequences. If we live for Jesus like this, then when we stand in judgment, Jesus will claim us. If we deny him by cowering to human pressure, then Jesus will deny us. Not only must we not fear telling the world that we love Jesus and are his disciples, but that love for Jesus will lead us to fight against anything that is not a passionate pursuit of him.

Verses 10-12 shows that Jesus is concerned about his disciples not caving in when the religious pressure them to conform to their rules and traditions. Jesus says that the disciples are going to be brought to trial before the synagogues, rulers, and authorities. Jesus tells them not to be nervous or anxious about how they will defend themselves because they will have the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit that will tell them what to say. The apostles were miraculously given God's truth so they could teach the world about the new covenant of Christ. We now have the prophetic word given to us by the Holy Spirit through the apostles (2 Peter 1:19-21). Peter commands us to make the same ready defense as Jesus told his disciples to give.

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:14–16 ESV)

We must be prepared to give a defense of the hope we have even when we are slandered or reviled for righteousness' sake. We must be ready to take a stand for the love of Jesus against people who claim to be the people of God but reveal their hypocrisy through their lack of grace and love driven obedience. We must hold on to the word of God and nothing else. We will overcome by declaring the very words of God. Notice the serious condemnation Jesus gives in verse 10. When we reject the words of God and desire to follow our own rules and traditions, there is no way that we can find grace and mercy. We are relying upon our own supposed way of righteousness, rather than the true way of righteousness revealed by God. Be zealous for the word of the Lord, not for our rules, traditions, or ways.

Conclusion

Jesus paints a strong warning for his disciples. True disciples are God-pleasers, not people pleasers. The only fear that should control our lives is a fear of God and his word. God is looking for zealous hearts who desire to obey him. Our obedience is not what God desires. God wants obedience from our love for him. We need to have pure hearts and rid ourselves of any hypocrisy because the day will come when the real condition of our hearts will be revealed.

One of the things that I have found fascinating in our study of Luke is how often we can take an event or parable out of its context. The parable we are going to study today is another instance of this. Scan your eyes from Luke 12:13 to the end of the chapter and you will notice that there is no change of topic. The rest of the twelfth chapter of Luke is dedicated to the explanation and teaching of this parable of the rich fool. As we study the rest of this chapter of the next few weeks I want us to be mindful that though we need to stop the lesson, Jesus is not done teaching us about what it means to be his disciple. Let's start our study with the situation that occurs causing Jesus to tell the parable.

The Parable's Setting (12:13-15)

At the beginning of chapter 12 we saw that thousands had gathered to hear Jesus. Jesus took the opportunity to teach his disciples about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, telling them not to be concerned about the opinion's of others and the need for the love of God to be the motive for all we do. In the midst of this scene, someone in the crowd has something to say to Jesus. Consider if you had the opportunity to say one thing to Jesus, what would it be? What would you want to ask Jesus? What would you want to tell Jesus about your life? Notice what this person says. "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Of all the things to speak to Jesus about, this person is concerned about wealth. The man wants Jesus to command his brother to give him a portion of his inheritance. This is sad. This is sad because the person fails to see that he is standing before the Savior of the world and all he can think about his wealth and possessions. Further, your father has died and the children are fighting over the will. This happens far too often, even among those who claim to be Christians. It is a sad situation. We should already know how Jesus is going to respond to this. Remember the last time we saw someone come to Jesus to tell another person to do something was Martha when she wanted Jesus to tell Mary to get up and help her. It didn't go well for Martha then and it will not go well for this person now. Never use the Lord to try to tell others what to do. We need to look at ourselves.

So Jesus is going to help this person and the crowds look at themselves. Jesus says to this person in the crowd, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Jesus is not small claims court. Jesus' mission is not to settle our little spats, especially when it comes to issues of no consequence. Our Lord did not come to make sure you receive certain financial benefits or wealth. The Lord is not about giving you health and wealth.

In verse 15 Jesus gives the warning. Watch out and be on your guard against all covetousness because one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. The principle for our lives is this: life is not about how much stuff you have. Now our world tells us quite differently. Our world tells us that the most toys wins in life. The American way is all about greed and accumulating as much as possible. We are considered a success by how much we own and how much we can show off. It is world of wealth and status. Jesus is going to tell a parable to teach us the foolishness of thinking that life is about having wealth and possessions.

The Parable (12:16-21)

Jesus describes a rich man whose land produces an amazing crop. He is rolling in produce. It is a great harvest. He has hit an amazing windfall of riches. We need to consider what the true problem is with this rich fool. Many suggestions have been made about the issue of his selfishness and lack of thanksgiving, but of which are true issues. However, the issue Jesus puts his finger on is that this rich man has made no preparations for his soul. His time is consumed with his stuff. There is no thanksgiving.

There is no worship to God. All that he has been given is for self-consumption. The rich man's concern is how he can store all he has so that he can continue to acquire more. Do we see our wealth as a gift for our personal gain or a gift from God to glorify God with what we have been entrusted? Jesus wants us to consider what our life pursuit truly is. We can say that we love Jesus and are following him with all our heart, but what truly occupies our time? Our time is so often consumed in our stuff. We have no time to teach because we have our stuff that we need to do. We have no time to serve one another because we are maintaining our stuff. We do not want to lead because our life goal is not about being pleasing to God but finding pleasure in this world. Our wealth is not for God, not for our brethren, and not for those who need. Our wealth is spent entirely on our selfish desires.

Jesus has a title for people who have this kind of thinking. The title is "fool!" Fool, you have wasted your time. All of our planning and all of our efforts and we have not taken into account that death happens at any time. There are two reasons why we are fools. The first reason is found in verse 20. Our souls are required of us and what is going to happen to all our possessions? Are you going to enjoy all that you are accumulating? No, because we will die one day and leave it all to others who will not appreciate what they have. One of our issues is a lack of contentment. We are not happy with what we have and do not stop to enjoy what God has already given us. We simply want more. Fool, what is going to happen to all your things when you are gone? You have not enjoyed them and you are not taking these possessions and wealth with you.

While preparing for our retirement, we have made no preparations for what will happen to us when Christ returns. All of our time, thoughts, efforts, and energy are spent living for now without thought of how we are using what God has given us to prepare for eternity. Notice verse 21: "So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." We are rich in this world but not rich toward God. Do not think that we are not under the influence of building bigger barns. What is one of the reasons for the economic mess we are in right now in this country? Everyone was buying bigger houses that they could not afford. The last few years have revealed a nation filled with covetousness and greed. Jesus instructs us to store treasures in heaven and to be rich toward God. How can we be rich toward God? What does it look like to lay up treasures in heaven so that we are prepared when we die and we stand before our Lord in judgment? Jesus explains what we need to do.

Rich Toward God (12:22-34)

Do not be anxious about your life (12:22-30). Life is not about what we will eat, or our body, or what we will put on. Life is not about what you look like. Life is not about the clothes you wear or the status you attain. Life is not about even eating. I think we should notice that being rich is not worrying about what we will eat. Very few people truly have the concern of what they will eat today. There is a problem in our hearts if we are anxious about our possessions. There is a problem when our concern is about clothes, food, beauty, and the like. Jesus gives us two reasons to not be anxious about material things.

(1) God will take care of you. You are children of God. Do we not believe that God will give us the things that we need to survive? Notice how God takes care of the rest of his creation. Jesus says to look at the ravens and at the flowers. God takes care of them. If God takes care of the lesser things like birds and flowers, how much more will he take care of those for whom Christ has died? Obviously we are showing our lack of faith and our foolishness when we worry about financial things. You may not have all you want, which is probably a good thing since often use our wealth selfishly rather than glorifying God. But you will have all you need for the Lord. God will provide.

(2) Your anxiety cannot fix the problem. The second reason that anxiety over material things is foolish is that you cannot solve your problem. Notice verse 25: "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" All of the worry that we have about finances does not change the

situation. We are focused on the wrong treasure. We need to worry about storing up heavenly treasure and being rich toward God. Stop giving your efforts to the possessions of this world.

Let us make sure we understand what Jesus is saying. Look at verses 29-30. "Do not seek what you are to eat." "Do not seek what you will drink." Do not be worried about these things. When we seek these things and are worried about these things we are acting like the world and not like his disciples (vs. 30). The world has these concerns. The true people of God do not have these worries. God's people do not seek these things. These things are not a concern to God's people.

Seek God's kingdom first (12:31-32). Instead of seeking the things of the world, disciples seek God's kingdom above all else. Disciples let God take care of the rest. We make our passionate pursuit to follow Jesus and the concerns of the kingdom. God can handle everything else in our lives. Notice back in verse 30 that Jesus points out that your Father knows you need them. God is our Father. He knows what you need, as any father knows what his child needs. God is the all-knowing Father and he knows exactly what you need. Not only does our Father know what we need, but notice verse 32 that it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. The Father is giving you the kingdom, which is the greatest thing we can receive. Yet we question and doubt if we can trust God to take care of the physical troubles and shortcomings in our lives. God is giving you his glorious kingdom. Do we suppose that he will not care of the other matters in our lives? Don't fear. You will be fine if you are seeking the kingdom. God will take care of you. I think our issue is that we do not seek the kingdom first expecting that God is going to take care of everything. Things are not taken care of, so we panic and do not trust God even more. But notice how Jesus worded this promise. Don't seek worldly things. Don't seek material possessions. Seek only his kingdom. Then God will add the other things to you because he knows what you need and it is his good pleasure to give these things to us. We must trust him first.

Give it away (12:33). The third way we become rich toward God and store up eternal treasures in heaven is by not being dependent or reliant on wealth. Notice in verse 33 how Jesus says we provide for ourselves eternal riches. We sell our possessions and give to the needy. We see our wealth as a gift from God to be used to glorify God. We show that we recognize that all we have is from God and God gets the glory for it. This is the failure of the rich man in the parable. He does not see that God made the land produce the crop. The rich man speaks only about himself, what he has done and what he will do. His wealth is all about spending it on himself. There is no consideration for using his wealth for the kingdom of God. I have made this point many times that I think shows our orientation toward wealth. We do not consider it a very big deal at all to spend 20-40 dollars to go out to eat. But giving 20-40 dollars to own a Bible that we will read, to buy another person a Bible, to give to the church to teach the world, to give to our brother or sister in Christ who has need, or use in some other godly manner becomes an expense we cannot afford. We are to be generous with all that God has blessed us. We are not only to be willing to share and give what we have, but we must do so. It is not enough to think we are generous. We need to show we are generous.

Focus on the heavenly treasure (12:34). Jesus gives a final thought about our hearts and our treasure. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Your heart is following your focus. The thing you make much of in your life is where your heart will be. When you seek the things of this world, then your heart is going to follow. We cannot think that we can be materialistic and desire the things of the world and still have a heart focused and passionately pursuing God. It is not possible. A passionate pursuit of Jesus is the best and safest investment we can ever make. Earthly riches are uncertain. But whatever investment we make in the kingdom of God is safe forever. Disciples understand that what they do with their wealth and possessions will determine if they have stored up eternal treasures on the day of judgment or have nothing invested for the day of judgment. Consider that if you have put your hope in this world then on the day of judgment you will not only not have any heavenly, eternal treasures, but

you will also not have any physical treasures because you are dead. You will have nothing but the expectation of eternal punishment in hell. We need to extend our planning past today and past retirement into eternity. Storing treasures in heaven will pull our hearts along with it. Where your treasure is, that is where your heart will be. Be rich toward God, not rich in this world.

Ready and Waiting
Luke 12:35-48

Ready or not, Jesus is coming again. The angels declared to the apostles, **“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:10–11 ESV)** What it means to be a disciple of Jesus is that we are ready and waiting for his return. Notice Jesus’ teaching on readiness in Luke 12:35-48.

Be Prepared (12:35-40)

Jesus begins with two images: being dressed for action and keeping the lamps burning. These are images of preparation. Verse 36 amplifies this imagery. We are to be like people who are waiting for the master to come home from a wedding feast so that we can open the door immediately when he comes. Jesus describes his disciples as people who are prepared so that when the master comes, they are awake and ready. Notice that this preparation is not a one-time effort. The servant does not get dressed for action and then falls asleep on the couch until the master returns. We cannot read this passage, say that we have believed and been baptized, and think that we are now prepared for his return. Jesus is looking past the initiation into discipleship. These people are already the servants of the master. The question is: Are they prepared servants? Are they ready?

Before we go further in the story, something extraordinary happens. What Jesus says in verse 37 is completely out of place and unexpected. Jesus says that the servants that are found ready and awake are blessed. Why are they blessed? What is going to happen? Jesus says that the master is going to dress himself for service and have the servants sit at the table. Then the master is going to come and serve the servants at the table. Absolutely unbelievable! The servants that are found ready, prepared, and awake are going to be given an amazing gift. The story should read that the master would sit at the table and the servants serve the meal to the master. The servants would be pleased to serve the master. But notice the turn of the story. The servants are going to be told to sit at the table and the master is going to prepare himself to serve and will serve them. A shocking turn of the story which provides the motivation for us to desire to be prepared and awake. We know the master is going to bless us if we are ready for him.

But the story turns again in verses 38-40. It is not known when the master will return. He might come in the middle of the night (second watch) or near dawn (third watch). In fact, Jesus describes his return as the arrival of a thief. The time of his arrival is not known. Notice Jesus’ clear teaching: “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Luke 12:40 ESV). This is a key teaching. If a person every claims to know or predict the arrival of the end of the world or the arrival of Jesus, you know that person is a liar. You know not to listen to anything that person says because Jesus said he is coming at an unexpected time. Our mission is not scour the scriptures with calculators trying to figure out a code for the second coming. He is not coming when you think. In May 2012 there is going to renewed hype for the end of the world. Here is what we know: Jesus is not coming on the date they claim. Jesus will fulfill these words by coming at an unexpected hour. He could do that by not coming in May but coming tomorrow. Now that would be a surprise. That is the point Jesus is making. You are not going to calculate his arrival. You do not know when he is coming. Rather than guessing, Jesus says you need to be ready every day, prepared and awake as if today is the day for his arrival.

Illustration: I see this a little bit like waiting for an important FedEx package that requires your signature. You know he coming but you don’t know what time. You look on the FedEx website and all it says is, “Out for delivery.” So now you don’t know what to do. Do I have time to get a haircut? Do I have

time to go to the store? I don't want to miss him coming because then I won't get the package. So we sit prepared, waiting for the arrival of the package. We are to live with this kind of anticipation every day waiting for the Lord's arrival. Today can be the day of his return. Now Jesus is going to explain to us what it means to be ready. What are the preparations we need to make so that we can be blessed when Jesus returns?

Proper Preparations (12:41-48)

Jesus asks the question himself in verse 42. "Who then is the faithful and wise manager?" What do we need to do to show our preparation?

Faithfulness (12:43-44). We show ourselves ready by being faithful to the Master's will. "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes." Blessed is the servant who is doing what the master says to be doing. The master does not want to arrive and find his servants sleeping. He wants to see them making preparations. We prepare by being faithful. We examine God's word. We study his laws. We change our lives to match what he has called us to do.

Not lulled into laziness (12:45-46). The second way we show our preparation is by not being lulled into laziness and resting. Notice what the unprepared servant says to himself in verse 45. "My master is delayed in coming." This is exactly what we do in our minds. Jesus predicted this is what we would think. Jesus even predicted it was going to be a long time before he came back. It would be so long that the servants are going to start thinking that he is delayed. The implication for us is clearly Jesus is not delayed. He is coming at the appropriate, determined time. The apostle Peter wrote that scoffers would come saying that things have always gone on as they are and he is delayed in his return. He is not delayed. He is coming. The problem with thinking that the master is delayed is that it leads to unfaithfulness. Notice what the servants do. They start beating the other servants, eat, drink, and get drunk. Basically, the servants start living how they want to live. Jesus is not talking about people in the world. They are already living for themselves. Jesus is talking about us, his servants. Time will continue to go by and we will lose our intensity in being prepared for him so that we start doing what we want to do. Another day goes by and we think that we can sin today because the master is delayed in his coming. Jesus predicts that we will become lazy servants, no longer serving him, but serving ourselves.

What is going to happen to the lazy servants? What will happen to the servants who when the master arrives are not found to be prepared, that is, living in passionate faithfulness to the master? Listen to what he says in verse 46: **"The master of the servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful."** (Luke 12:46 ESV) Are you glad this is a parable? This is graphic language. The master will come and cut the servant into pieces. Except that we should not be too relieved because the punishment that awaits us is far worse: eternal torment and separation from God. We will be put with the unbelievers and unfaithful (12:46). Jesus is clear in Matthew's gospel that the place reserved for the unbelievers and unfaithful is eternal punishment in hell (Matthew 5:29-30; 25:31-46). You were a servant, but you are cast with the unfaithful because you were not ready on the day he arrived. Verses 47-48 continues to impress upon us the gravity of our sin. The condemnation is great for knowing the Lord but not being ready.

Conclusion

Are you ready? Have you maintained faithful, passionate living for the Lord? Or have our hearts told us that the master is delayed and has led us to living for ourselves, obeying our desires and lusts? Stay dressed for action, keep the lamps burning, and live every day in expectation of our master's coming. When he comes, we will be blessed and will sit at the banquet table, life forever in the house of the Lord.

Jesus begins this final section of this chapter that the reason he came was to cast fire on the earth. Jesus has come to bring judgment, not comfort and ease. The fire Jesus was bringing the consuming, purifying fire of God's judgment. In fact, Jesus was going to endure his own fiery trial with his impending death on the cross. The baptism Jesus speaks of is his own suffering that he will endure. The thesis establishes in this paragraph is that he is going to endure suffering himself. Difficulties, suffering, and judgment are also coming because that is what it means to be follower of Jesus.

Being A Disciple Divides Family (12:51-53)

While Jesus came to bring peace between us and God, Jesus does not bring peace between us and other people. The reason is because not everyone will belong to Jesus. Therefore there will be division, difficulties, and problems between those who are the people of God and those who are not. Jesus suffered and it will happen to us. You need to know that if you are passionate about Jesus, you will experience conflict, division, and strife. In particular, Jesus points out the strife that will occur within families (12:52-53). Jesus had family conflicts. Remember that his brothers did not believe he was the Messiah. This would lead to some pretty tense family gatherings. The more devoted we become, the more conflicts will arise. There are usually two directions that family conflict is expressed: criticism or ostracism. Either our family will criticize us for being devoted to following Jesus or they will cut us off from family gatherings for being devoted to following Jesus.

Many of you have experienced this division. Many of us are fortunate to have families that are not divided by loyalties to Jesus. But we must recognize that there are many here who must endure that challenge. Jesus wants you to know that if you are experiencing conflict because of your love for Jesus, don't be surprised. Jesus endured the same. Following Jesus causes family problems. The only way those conflicts are resolved is if the whole family becomes passionate followers of Jesus. Otherwise family members are not going to understand why you put the Lord ahead of your family. When you are criticized for your faith, you know that you are enduring such suffering with good cause. The Lord is everything and cannot take second place just to keep harmony within our physical families. I believe this is what Paul is was teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:15. A believer is not enslaved to unbelievers, even in marriage, to put the family ahead of faith and service to Jesus. When you are cut off and ostracized know that you have a family here to support you. You can belong with us and join us in our family. Being a disciple of Jesus means that families will become divided.

Disciples Recognize The Signs of Judgment (12:54-56)

Jesus goes further to ask if we see the signs of the coming judgment. We can be smart about the weather. Living in south Florida, each year we are told to be prepared for hurricane season. Each year we make sure we have supplies so that if a storm comes, we do not have to rely on trying to find everything we need at the last minute. We may carry batteries and bottled water. We may carry canned goods and an extra propane tank for our grills. We may fill up our gas tanks so that we are ready for the storm. Even on a daily basis we check the weather so that we can be prepared for what may come. We do not want to be caught by surprise if a hurricane is coming. We do not want to be caught off guard if a severe thunderstorm is moving through. It is really nice to have these mobile apps so that you can be prepared. But are we prepared for the coming judgment? In our last lesson Jesus talked about his return and the need for his servants to be ready and not unfaithful. Jesus amplifies that message here. We make every preparation for what will happen to us today. We wear the right clothes and make sure that

we are ready for the day. But we are preparing for all the wrong things. How foolish is it to be prepared for a hurricane and not prepared for the coming of the Lord and the judgment he brings with him? How foolish to check the weather daily but not check our hearts daily! Why do we put so much effort into the environment and weather and fail to put in this much effort and even more to prepare for our Lord's coming?

Disciples Are Ready For Judgment (12:57-59)

The final three verses of chapter 12 tell a short parable about how disciples should be ready for judgment. Settle with your accuser before you get to the judge so that you are not handed over to the officer to be put in prison. The picture is fairly simple. Don't wait till you get to the judge. Settle your debt beforehand so that you will not be put in prison when you are brought before the judge.

Jesus' message is for us to recognize that if we ignore God's call to repentance we will be dragged away into judgment. We need to understand our debt before God, see the coming judgment that will be passed against us, and settle up with God before its too late. We are foolish to not settle our account before God before the day of judgment. The signs of judgment are there. Jesus has promised that he is going to return and he is looking for prepared servants. To not get right with God before his return means that we will receive the full brunt of eternal punishment.

The wages of our sins is death, that is, eternal punishment and separation from God (Romans 6:23). Every violation and mistake against God's law is held in account. The book of Revelation describes all people standing before the throne of God and the books containing our actions being opened. **"And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done" (Revelation 20:12)**. Jesus said, **"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37)**. The massive debt we hold should come into our hearts when we think about every act and every word being the terms of our judgment. Everything we have said and done will be exposed in the heavenly court. So what are we to do? Let's look at the words of the apostle Paul to Titus.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. (Titus 3:3-8 ESV)

Paul teaches that all of us were a mess. We are all a mess, full of sins, enslaved to various passions and pleasures. But the goodness and loving kindness of God appeared through Jesus. God saved us through Jesus, not because we did righteous works. Our works are filthy and wicked. God saved us because of his own mercy. So how are we saved? Paul says that we receive God's mercy through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. There is a life transformation that takes place as we submit in obedience to the Lord. Baptism is not getting wet. Baptism is our declaration to God that we are submitting to his will and changing our lives for him. This is the moment of transformation, or to use the words of Paul, the moment of regeneration. A whole new life is now on display. We are justified by his grace and given the hope of eternal life rather than eternal punishment which is due to us from our sins. Those who receive God's mercy and love are to be careful to devote themselves to good works.

These good works do not save us but are our response to God for showing his mercy toward us. We see God's love and goodness and respond with love and righteousness toward God.

Disciples of Jesus have made preparations for judgment. We know we are going to stand before God in judgment. This is a sure and trustworthy statement. Do you want to settle your account with God before the judgment so that you can be found justified and given life? Or do you want to wait until the day of judgment and heard the guilty verdict passed against us? Wise people make preparations before it is too late. See the coming judgment, forsake the things of this world, even family, and live a regenerated life for the Lord based on his mercy and teachings.

Repentance and Restoration
Luke 13:1-9

The thirteenth chapter of Luke begins a section in which Luke is going to describe for us the nature of the kingdom of God. Jesus is going to teach us what the kingdom of God is like and who belongs in God's kingdom. The first verse begins with a tragic event.

Pilate was not known for his kindness or tolerance. We do not have a specific record of this event in history. Some Galileans had come to offer sacrifices. Pilate ordered his Roman soldiers to go to where these Galileans were bringing their sacrifices and slaughter them. To add insult to it all, then their blood was mixed with the blood of the animals that were to be sacrificed. Massacre and desecration all in one moment. Some people come to Jesus to tell him about this horrible event. Jesus uses this event to teach a number of important spiritual truths.

God Does Not Directly Use Tragedy To Judge Us For Our Sins

Notice how Jesus deals with what it seems the people were implying. These Galileans must have been some sort of wicked people for this awful massacre to happen to them. Jesus completely disagrees with their assessment. Jesus asks, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?" Jesus' answer is no. No, they were not worse sinners. This event did not happen because they were more sinful than other Galileans. In verse 4 Jesus uses another tragic event to prove his point. Were the people who died from a tower falling on them worse offenders than all others who lived in Jerusalem. Jesus' answer again is no.

It was common for the Jews to attribute disaster directly to sins. When you read Job 4 you will notice that the three friends of Job declare that the reason Job is suffering is because of his sins. In John 9:1-3 even his disciples ask who sinned for this man to be born blind: himself or his parents. They believed that suffering was directly tied to sinfulness. We fall into the same trap and we even see such false declarations in the religious world. When the earthquake happened in Haiti, some people declared that it was because of the sinfulness of that country. When the hurricane hit New Orleans some people decided that it was because of the sins of the city. Do you see Jesus' answer to this? Do you really think that these people are worse than another so that such an event happened? For anyone to suggest that a person who experiences tragedy is a worse sinner is to be completely ignorant of the scriptures. What sins did Jesus commit for his to suffer the way he did? The scriptures are clear that he did nothing to deserve that suffering. Were the apostles worse sinners such that they were systematically hunted down and killed? Was Job a worse sinner so that all his children were killed?

God is not singling people out and punishing them for their sins. These are words of comfort that I needed to hear also. When we learned that our daughter was born with a disability, I wondered if this was some kind of punishment for my sins. What did I do wrong for this to happen? The answer is that I have done all kinds of things wrong. I am a sinner before the Lord. But that is not the reason why she was born with a disability. This is not the reason why a hailstorm destroyed my car. This is not the reason why I've had a flat tire on the road. God is not karma. We must rid ourselves of the false notion that good things only happen to good people and bad things only happen to bad people. We see good things happen to bad people all the time. We see bad things happen to good people all the time. Now, we certainly experience consequences for our sinful decisions. If I decide to run off with another woman, then I must expect the consequence to be the destruction of my family. But calamities, sicknesses, and disasters are not from the hand of God. Think about this logically. If your children disobey you, you do not go about trying to sabotage their lives or kill them. God is our Father who is the perfect parent who perfectly loves us. It is not his desire to destroy us.

All Have Sinned

Notice how Jesus defeats this argument. We are all sinners equally. No one stands guiltless before God. All of us deserve punishment. Jesus turns the tables on these people who told him about this event. We are not any better than those who have perished under such tragedies. In fact, God's judgment will come on each of us if we do not repent. Jesus turns the direction of the discussion. God is not going to kill you on the spot for committing sins. But understand an important truth, you will be judged if you do not repent. God does not need to bring physical death to us for our sins because all of us are worthy of spiritual death and that day of judgment is coming. God has appointed the day of judgment. All sinners face the same fate before God. Everyone must stand before him in judgment and will be called into account for the things we have done while we lived. If God is going to start killing people because of their sins, there would be no person left on the earth.

Parable of Grace and Repentance

In verses 6-9 Jesus tells a parable to help motivate the people toward repentance. The parable is about a man who plants a fig tree but the fig tree continues to not bear fruit. This was a common description given by the prophets concerning the nation of Israel (Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1; Jeremiah 8:13; 24:1-10). Israel was a fig tree that had borne no fruit and was worthy of judgment. Notice this is what the parable teaches. The man with the fig tree says that the tree has not borne fruit for three years. Therefore cut it down because it is wasting the ground. The vinedresser responds to give it one more year. He will dig around it and put fertilizer on it and see if it bears fruit next year. If it does not, then cut it down.

Picture of grace. The first message that Jesus wants us to learn is the graciousness of God. God does not want to bring judgment against the nation of Israel. In the parable one more year is given to see if the tree will now bear fruit. The point was that the tree did not deserve to continue because of its lack of fruit. The nation of Israel was deserving of immediate judgment. However, God was allowing more time for them to repent. The same gracious message is given to us today. God continues to be patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but for all to reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9). One of God's great graces that we must appreciate is his giving of more time. God gives more time to try to save more people.

Those who are in God's kingdom are those who repent. The call is for the people to repent before it is too late. Repentance is an important and rich term that I want to spend the rest of this lesson exploring. What does it mean to repent? First, repentance begins with a contrite heart. When Peter preaches his sermon on the day of Pentecost before the crowd, we read that they were "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37). Repentance begins with a heart that is filled with remorse and contrition. God desires the heart that comes humbly before him, broken because of the knowledge of our sins against our Lord. Second, repentance is a change of our minds. We are going to admit our sins and confess our failure to our God. We are determining in our minds to serve the Lord. We are deciding with firm resolve to follow Jesus. We are declaring our distain for sin and our love for God. Finally, repentance is about changing our lives to conform to God's will. With a broken heart and a determined mind, we approach our day with a life change. To use the language of our parable, repentance is about bearing fruit in our lives. There are to be visible results from a life that loves Jesus. The apostle Paul writes down what will be visible in our lives when we have a heart that is crushed by sin and loves Jesus.

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things

will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:19–24 ESV)

We are to produce fruit. Christians are not consumers, but producers. We produce fruit that is useful to God, to each other, and to the world. A consumer comes to services, sits, and leaves. Consuming resources but never engaging the heart, never joining to the other Christians, and never giving one's life to God. In God's grace he is allowing time for each of us to repent. Time has still been provided for us to change and bear fruit for him. Do as the vinedresser says he would do in verse 8. Prepare the soil of your heart and spread fertilizer so that you can bear fruit before the judgment comes. Rip out the wickedness in your heart, remove the obstacles that keep you from him, and take steps that will help you bear fruit before your God.

Consider the two stories in this text. These people went to worship God and they did not know that day would be their last. The eighteen who died at the tower of Siloam did not know it would be the last day they would live. Repent today. Give your heart and live to Jesus today. Our God is looking for fruit that shows our repentance. Otherwise, uprooted and cast away into eternal punishment on the day of judgment.

In our study of Luke's gospel we have seen Luke record events that show who Jesus is. In the first half of the gospel that is the question Luke is answer: Who is this Jesus? This is notable in scenes like when Jesus calms the storm and the disciples ask, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?" (Luke 8:25). Luke records another miracle in the thirteenth chapter, but this is not the point. It is easy for us to approach the miracles of Jesus and think that the author's point is to simply show the power of Jesus. When we carefully read this miraculous event you will notice that the emphasis is not on the miracle but on the meaning of the miracle in terms of the kingdom. With these things in mind, let's look at the miracle Jesus performs.

Disabled Woman

Jesus is teaching in the synagogues on one of the Sabbath days. The Jews would gather to the various synagogues on the seventh day of the week in the first century where they would pray, sing, and listen to a reading of the scriptures. In the synagogue is a woman for has been bent over for 18 years and could not straighten herself. Imagine this scene as this woman walks into the synagogue. Verse 12 says that Jesus saw her and called her over. Listen to what Jesus says. "Woman, you are freed from your disability." Then, laying hands on her, she was immediately made straight. Then she began glorifying God in the midst of the synagogue. What a great event and what a great miracle to happen in the midst of the synagogue. This would be similar to someone here having a disability and on this Lord's Day Jesus healed that person. How exciting! This should have propelled the worship that day. This miracle should have intensified their prayers, songs, and scripture readings.

However, the leader of the synagogue becomes indignant with Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath. The Jews considered healing a work and you were not supposed to work on the Sabbath. While the Jewish people were not to work on the Sabbath, they had imposed ridiculous human rules such that they are upset when the hand of God moved on the Sabbath day. We can understand why Jesus becomes upset when he sees this kind of reaction. Rather than praising God, the synagogue leader is indignant. Jesus calls them hypocrites. You will untie your oxen or donkey so that they can drink water but you cannot be joyful over the healing of this disabled woman! Later in this lesson we will tie in the meaning of this event to the parable Jesus will tell. But before we can observe the parable, we need to see the meaning of this miracle and what it means in terms of the kingdom.

Battling Kingdoms

There are three things to notice in this miracle and its explanation. **(1) Luke does not simply state that this woman is disabled (13:11).** Notice that she has a disabling spirit. This does not mean that she is demon-possessed, necessarily, but she has been directly afflicted by Satan. **(2) Jesus says that she has been bound by Satan for 18 years (13:16).** This problem has been for a long time. **(3) This woman is a daughter of Abraham (13:16).** Luke is putting pieces together for us that we must not fly by without first contemplating. Verse 16 is teaching us something very crucial about the kingdom. This woman is a daughter of Abraham. She is part of God's covenant family. But she has been bound by Satan for 18 years. Carefully notice the language in this verse. Look at verse 16. What did Jesus say happened? She has been loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day. She's been released from her enslavement. Look back in verse 12. What did Jesus say happened? She had been set free. Through Jesus this woman has been freed from her bondage.

This is why Jesus calls them hypocrites. They have failed to see what has just happened. They have failed to see the significance of this event. They will set their ox or donkey free to lead it to water but cannot see this woman has been set free from Satan. In this miracle we are seeing that Jesus is fighting Satan. Satan has people in his grasp. Satan has directly afflicted people, and this disability was a visualization of that truth. Jesus is fighting Satan and winning! Eighteen years have passed and this woman could not be set free. There was nothing she could do to break free from Satan's grasp. There was nothing others could do for her to release her from her slavery. This truth reveals the great power of Satan. But there is one who is greater. Jesus has come and he is fighting against Satan and winning. Jesus' healing shows the collapse of Satan's power over people. The leader of the synagogue is not seeing the great winning of the war. Jesus is battling and beating Satan. Further, the Abrahamic promise is being fulfilled. It is notable that this woman is called a "daughter of Abraham." Luke is calling to mind the promise God made to Abraham that the nations were going to be blessed. A deliverer would come and set the world free. This healing shows that freedom has come to the world through Jesus.

Kingdom Victory

But Jesus is not done. Please notice a key word in verse 18, "Therefore." The parable he tells is an explanation of the event that has just happened. Jesus is telling this parable in direct connection to this woman's healing. Notice how Jesus begins this parable: "What is the kingdom of God like?" This is the theme of these chapters in Luke. From Luke 13-18 we are reading about what the kingdom of God is like. Who is in this kingdom? What is the nature of the kingdom? Luke is no longer explaining who Jesus is but who is in the kingdom and what is this kingdom like.

The first parable is of a mustard seed that is planted in a garden. The seed grew, became a tree, and the birds made nests in its branches. There are two points from this parable that Jesus teaches us about this kingdom. First, the kingdom will begin small but will experience immense growth. What will begin as a small seed will turn into a tree. Second, the kingdom will provide rest and comfort to all peoples. Not only is the kingdom picture as a great tree, but it is a tree that provides shade and shelter for the birds. This image is the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy.

22 Thus says the Lord GOD: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. 24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it." (Ezekiel 17:22-24 ESV)

The context of Ezekiel 17 is the destruction of Israel for their sins and covenant breaking. But there is this prophecy of hope that God will take a little twig from the tree and plant it. It will become a great tree and bear fruit (recall last week's lesson about Jesus calling for his people to bear fruit). All the birds will rest in this tree. The kingdom of God is a pleasant place to dwell and protects those who live under its shade. All peoples from all over the globe can come into this kingdom to find rest, comfort, and protection.

The final point comes from the parable of the leaven that a woman hid in three measures of flour until it was all leavened. What is beginning small is going to permeate the world.

Putting It All Together

What appears to be tiny and insignificant will prove to have been the beginning of God's mighty kingdom. The rule and reign of God has returned visibly in this miracle. Jesus is battling Satan and winning. The shackles that Satan has on people is being released. God has returned to his people. This woman and her healing is the visible sign that the children of Abraham are being set free from Satan's power. How dare the religious of the day cry foul when God is battling Satan's rule and is displaying his victory through this woman! The Sabbath is the perfect day for this healing, battling Satan, and setting this woman free. Remember the commanded purpose of the Sabbath:

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:15 ESV) The Sabbath was to remember that they were slaves in Egypt. The Sabbath is the perfect day for setting the children of Abraham free from Satan because this was the day the people of Israel to remember that they were enslaved in Egypt and had to be set free by God. Therefore, the people are hypocrites for not understanding the meaning of freedom in the miracle. How dare the leader of the synagogue say that this should have been done on another day but the Sabbath! The Sabbath is the only day this should have happened!

There are three lessons I want for you to take with you today that must change your life from this text.

(1) The children of Abraham have been set free. Jesus has come to free us from our enslavement to Satan. Listen to the apostle Paul:

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:22–23 ESV) You were enslaved to Satan and sin but in Christ you have been set free to eternal life. The children of Abraham have been set free. The apostle Paul tells us how to be children of Abraham.

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:29 ESV) We must belong to Jesus. We must give our lives to him.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:25–27 ESV)

(2) Praising God is the response to our freedom. What does the woman do when Jesus heals her of her disability in which she had been bound by Satan? She praises God. Immediately she is glorifying God (13:13). That is what our lives must look like. Our response to being set free from sin and being welcomed into the kingdom of God is a constant praise to God. We must declare what God has done for us. We must with joy and enthusiasm praise God through prayer, praise God through song, praise God through meditation, and praise our Savior all day long.

(3) Nothing is more important than the kingdom. The ruler of the synagogue is more concerned about their traditions and rules rather than the fact that Jesus is conquering Satan. Nothing is more important than the kingdom and belonging to this kingdom. Nothing can interfere with our work in the kingdom. Our causes and things that we think are important cannot be elevated above or hinder the work of the kingdom. This kingdom must grow and spread. The kingdom is permeating the earth. We must take responsibility for that growth. We must see this kingdom spread in our community and in our spheres of influence. We are witnessing the kingdom of God setting people free from sin, bringing them into the light, and coming to the fountain of living waters. The people you see in this room today are a small group of the millions who belong to the kingdom of God. Nothing can interfere with our working together, joining together, teaching together, worshiping together, studying together, praying together, and loving our Lord together as we experience the victory in the glorious kingdom of God.

Will Few Be Saved?
Luke 13:22-35

Christianity is something that is often portrayed as an easy thing to participate in and belong to. Just simply believe and you are a Christian. Or just be a good person and you are with the Lord. Further, the religious world accepts the idea that there are many paths that lead to God. People will say that there are all sorts of ways to find God. They say people can reach God through Jesus, through Mohammed, through Joseph Smith, through Zen, through the various eastern religions, through Judaism, and so forth. Is this true? Is it easy to be in a relationship with God? Is it just a matter of saying a prayer or wanting to be with God?

As Jesus is passing through the various town and villages preaching, someone asks him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" Before we read Jesus' response we should consider what nature of Jesus' preaching that would cause someone in his audience to ask this question. This question implies that Jesus was not teaching that coming into the kingdom of God was something easy. If all that Jesus is teaching is mere confession or prayer, then this question does not make any sense. However, Jesus must be teaching about the difficult nature of coming into his kingdom which would lead someone to ask this question. Let's look at how Jesus answers this direct question: Will few be saved?

Strenuous Effort Required (13:24-25)

Jesus answers with three images to show the nature of entrance into his kingdom. The first word Jesus says is "strive." The NIV and HCSB read, "Make every effort." The NLT reads, "Work hard" and the NET reads, "Exert every effort." These translations capture the idea of the Greek word. The BDAG lexicon says this Greek word means, "To fight, struggle" and of this verse, "Strain every nerve to enter." With this, Jesus says to strive to enter through the narrow door. We cannot just easily stroll through this door to enter his kingdom and receive salvation. Entering the kingdom for salvation requires strength of will and a struggle to follow Jesus on the path of discipleship. The reason the door is narrow is not to keep us out, but to cause us to recognize that most will not accept his terms. Finding salvation requires more concentrated effort than most people are willing to put forth. Jesus does not say that being his disciple and entering into his kingdom is easy. The door to enter to receive salvation is narrow. The door to dwell in his kingdom is narrow. Exerting every effort is required of us. There is nothing passive on our end.

The third image is that many will seek to enter but will not be able to enter. Verse 25 contains a short parable of the master of the house shutting the door and being unable to enter. Wanting to enter is not enough. Earnest effort is required. Entry occurs on God's terms, not ours. Further, there is not automatic entry. The striving that Jesus speaks of is not a metaphor for baptism. Jesus is not saying that you must strive to be baptized and then you are in the kingdom. This is a constant striving. This is not a point in time when you believed in Jesus, repented of your sins, confessed him as the Son of God, and then was baptized. Those who enter through the narrow door continually exert every effort to enter. Notice that these people want to enter. Jesus says that they will seek to enter. In the parable the people are knocking on the door and asking for the Lord to open the door. Just because we want in the kingdom does not mean we are in the kingdom.

Proximity Is Not Enough (13:26-27)

The master of the house says that he does not know where these people who are knocking on the door came from. The point is that you do not belong in this kingdom. The master does not know who you are or where you are from. You have no relationship with the master that he would open the door.

Now the people think they do have a relationship with the master. Notice their response: "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets." They are saying that they know him. We ate with you and drank with you. You came to our city and taught in our streets. Yet the master repeats the same words. "I do not know where you come from." We do not have a relationship. You may have heard of me and you may think you know me, but I do not know you.

These words will surely sound familiar on the day of judgment. We sat in your pews. We heard your word. We went to church. But you did not go through the door. You may think you have a relationship with him, but proximity to Jesus is not enough. It is not enough to say you went to church. It is not enough to say you spent some time with Jesus. Jesus is not looking for a casual relationship. He does not know what that is. People who are in his kingdom are those who are striving to enter through the narrow door. The master continues, "Depart from me, all you workers of evil!" There are only two camps. Either we are working to enter through the narrow door or we are working in evil. Jesus does not offer a third choice. You are either working for him or you are working for yourself, which means you are working for Satan.

Eternal Punishment

Eternal punishment is not being in the eternal kingdom of God. There is no other alternative. Either we are in the eternal kingdom of God or we are choose eternal punishment. Listen to the description that Jesus gives of hell, this eternal punishment, in verse 28. "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." This is a common description that Jesus gives of hell. The point is that this is not a place you want to go. Notice in this text that the anguish comes from knowing on what you are missing out on. You will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you are cast out. The exchange is not worth it.

You do not have to strive for the kingdom of God. You do not have to make every effort and exert yourself to enter the kingdom of God. But understand that you will be cast out to the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Friends, this is not a good trade. Living for yourself now for 80 years so that you can live in punishment for eternity is not a good exchange. The giving of ourselves to enter the kingdom of God is worth it. Verse 29 describes people coming from the east and the west. All peoples have the opportunity to receive salvation and enter the kingdom of God. Make every effort to enter and you will be one of these who are at reclining at the banquet in the kingdom of God. Consider the contrast: weeping and gnashing of teeth or reclining at the table for a banquet. The choice is clear. Yet to often we are unwilling to make the sacrifice and dedicate ourselves to making every effort so that we can belong to that great feast.

Verse 30 is a surprising teaching by Jesus to this Jewish audience. Many of the Jews in the first century were rejecting his message. These that Jesus had come to save are rejecting the salvation message, refusing to enter the kingdom for salvation. These are the "first" but they will be last. That is, the message of salvation and the kingdom first came to them, but they will not enter because of their refusal to strive to enter. The "last" are the Gentiles who receive the message of salvation and the kingdom last of all, but they will strive to enter. They will participate in the feast of the Messiah. Those who seem close to the kingdom can be very far away and those who seem far away from the kingdom may be closer to entering than you think. The Jews would have thought they were all in the kingdom and the Gentiles were not. However, Jesus says the Gentiles are going to enter while the Jews will not.

Conclusion

Funerals are a sad occasion. They are sad because so many are comforted by false hope. Someone stands up and preaches about how this person has gone to heaven even when the person gave

absolutely no effort or care for the kingdom of God. Foolish things are said at these funeral like, "The person has gone to a better place." Most have not gone to a better place. The door is narrow. If they did not strive to enter through the narrow door, they do not inherit eternal life simply because they died. Friends, we are not entering through to salvation if we are not making every effort.

The words against Jerusalem in verse 34 are true words for us today. Jesus is trying to bring you into his kingdom. He came to bring us the hope of restoration. He established his kingdom and offers salvation from our sins. Yet we refuse to be gathered into our Lord. We do not want to give the effort. We are unwilling to trade the giving of our physical life to gain eternal life. Knowing about God is not enough. Sitting in pews is not enough. Being baptized is not enough. Believing in Jesus is not enough. Strive to enter through narrow door. Few will be saved. Many will not accept Jesus' terms. Be saved and enter through the door.

The Parable of Excuses Luke 14:1-24

The thirteenth chapter of Luke has asked the question if few would be saved. Jesus gave the answer teaching the need to giving every effort to strive through the narrow door. There will be many who seek but will not enter into the kingdom. Jesus is not looking for a casual relationship but for those who will give everything to follow him. Jesus' teaching sets the tone for the fourteenth chapter of Luke. Luke is going to show us who are the ones who are thrust out. Who are the many who will not be saved? Who are not in the kingdom?

God Who Rescues (1-6)

The first 24 verses of Luke 14 contain one story. The setting is another Sabbath day when the ruler of the Pharisees invited Jesus to dine with him at his house. Through our study of Luke we have seen that the Pharisees are not genuinely questioning and learning about Jesus, but are trying to discredit Jesus (cf. Luke 11:53-54). Our author, Luke, wants us to know that this mentality has not changed. Jesus has been invited to the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees with the same purpose. Notice that the Pharisees are watching him carefully. Verse 2 reveals that there was a man at this dinner who had dropsy. Dropsy is a condition where there is a buildup of excess fluids in the cavities or tissues of the body. Luke is making a point: this man is not at this dinner by coincidence. Do you see the setup? It is the Sabbath day and Jesus is invited to dinner in the house of the ruler of the Pharisees. And by great surprise, there is a person who has dropsy at this dinner and they are watching Jesus carefully. Jesus knows the hearts of people. Jesus recognizes the setup. Please notice the text says that Jesus "responded" or "answered." The Pharisees have not said anything. But Jesus is answering their hearts as he asks the question, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" Notice that the Pharisees remain silent. They are not interested in learning from Jesus or considering their religious convictions. They just want to see what Jesus will do so they can discredit him and dispatch of him. Jesus takes the man with dropsy, heals him, and sends him away. This shows this man was not here for the dinner but was merely a pawn in the Pharisees' plan. So Jesus heals him and sends him away. Notice Jesus' teaching:

Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out? (Luke 14:5 ESV) These Pharisees want to use healing as a violation of the law of Moses concerning the Sabbath which said not to work. Jesus shows the ludicrous nature of their thinking by asking if they would rescue an ox or rescue their son who had fallen into a well. Can you imagine telling your son that he would have to stay in the well until Sunday and then I will come back and pull you out? As we noted a couple weeks ago, the Sabbath was a day to remember God's grace and deliverance from Egyptian slavery, when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt at the time of Moses (Deuteronomy 5:15). The Sabbath was day to remember how they had been rescued by God from the hand of the Egyptians. Who does not rescue their animal on the Sabbath? How much more should God not rescue this person who is suffering from this medical condition! Now it is easy to stop the story here because our Bibles put headers between verses and 7 and that makes us want to stop. But notice that verse 7 says that Jesus told a parable to those who had been invited to this dinner. Jesus has much more to say. He does not heal this person and leave. Now Jesus will teach those not in the kingdom of God.

Wedding Parable (7-14)

Verse 7 is very important. Jesus tells a parable. Jesus is not offering a lesson on dinner etiquette. Jesus is not concerned about how people sit at a table. But he is concerned about the hearts of these people because it is causing them to miss out on participating in the kingdom of God. The key teaching

of this parable is that it is better to let others exalt you than to be humiliated. Don't assume for yourself a position. Take the lowest place and let others give you honor. Now, while this is practical information, please recognize that Jesus is teaching to their hearts about their relationship to God.

The proud will not be in the kingdom of God. Don't assume your position before God. Humility is required to enter the kingdom. Better for God to exalt you as you live a humble life, then to assume honor and for God to humiliate you. God honors humility with exaltation.

Humility is a character trait that is often misunderstood. Humility is not merely how you think about yourself. Humility is observed by our actions. How we treat others reveals humility or pride. Notice that Jesus speaks to the host of this dinner in verse 12. Don't invite people who can repay you for your kindness. Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind and you will be blessed. People who are humble do not do things to be repaid. Those in the kingdom of God are not concerned about what others can do for them. Humility is seen in doing good without expecting repayment. Do you see what Jesus was saying? Why was Jesus telling the Pharisees to invite the poor, crippled, and blind? Was he just trying to exchange one external, heartless act for another external, heartless act? No, but the humble heart cares for those who can do nothing for you in return.

The scriptures teach us a critical thought that should maintain humility and block any sort of pride. To know God is to understand his infinite greatness and goodness and our own sinfulness and smallness. We are not in the kingdom receiving salvation if we do not understand this truth. Take the lowest seat in the kingdom of God. Stop thinking about yourself. Stop thinking about what others should be doing for you. Don't act like you are important or that people should give you any attention. Take the lowest seat at the table and let God exalt you. When you think you are someone, God says he will humble you (14:11). **Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12 ESV)** A brother in Bowling Green always made this point: it is hard to fall when you are on your knees. We need to get on our knees because God is infinitely great and good and we are so small and so sinful.

The Parable of Excuses (15-24)

This led to some tension in the room. Have you ever been in an uncomfortable situation and feel like something needs to be said to smooth things over. One who is at the table, after hearing Jesus' teaching, declares, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Basically, "it's going to be great for us." It seems he did not get the message of what Jesus was saying. They are the ones missing out of the kingdom of God. They are missing out on salvation. So Jesus tells a sharper parable to get his message across. The invitation to a great banquet has gone out. The image of a great feast or banquet was a common symbol for the Messianic kingdom (see verse 15, eating bread in the kingdom of God; also Luke 13:29).

However, when the time of the banquet arrived, they all began to make excuses for a variety of reasons. Everyone has things they think are more important to do. One has purchased a field, one has purchased oxen, and one has just married. Something else is more important than the feast in the kingdom. Each person is making a judgment that other things are more valuable than Jesus and his ministry. This is sad. What could possibly be more important than sitting at the table and feasting in the kingdom? You would rather go look at a field than feast? You would rather go look at oxen than feast? You are married and can't come? Don't you think she would like to come to the feast also?

What business could possibly be more important than making sure you have eternal life?? What property could be more valuable to have than a title to heaven? What relationship could ever be more important than the one you have with the God who made you and sent his Son to die for your sins? What could be more important in your life? Who turns down a feast for these things?

When we treasure other things more than we treasure Jesus we are left out of this kingdom. We are part of the many who are seeking but will not enter because we did not give every effort to Jesus. The invitation goes out to the streets of the city. Those invited are the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. Please notice who Jesus said is to be invited to their feasts in verse 13: the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Jesus is rescuing the outcasts. The message of the kingdom first went to the Jewish nation but they rejected. Therefore they will not participate in the glorious kingdom of our Lord. Jesus is going to the rest of the world and inviting them to the kingdom.

The master's goal is to fill his house (14:23). The master will take whoever will accept him and his terms. Who will treasure Jesus above all else? Who will not make excuses for the affairs of this world that they put in the way of being in the kingdom of God? We like to make all kinds of excuses for why we cannot strive and give every effort to be with him. We think that our excuses matter to God. We think we have good reasons. But in the face of what is being offered, our excuses are foolish. It is sad to me to hear all the excuses we make for why we cannot worship Jesus, serve Jesus, love Jesus, or give ourselves fully to Jesus. It truly breaks my heart to hear people think their excuse is acceptable because we are failing to see that we are treasuring that activity more than Jesus. Why isn't Bible study the most important thing in the world to us? Why isn't worship the most important thing in the world to us? We think we are seeking but we are dying without Christ. Not only us, but the world is also dying outside of Christ. We are living in the days of verse 23. The message is going out and God wants you to come to his kingdom. We must urge people to come. We must convince people to enter the kingdom, compelling them to see the great feast that has been prepared.

Hear the warning: do not make excuses for not coming to the feast. The kingdom is filled with people who will humble themselves before God. Jesus has come to rescue us from our sins.

The Great Cost of Discipleship

Luke 14:25-35

Luke is continuing to teach us about who can and cannot be in the kingdom of Christ. Not everyone can be a disciple of Jesus. We saw in Luke 13 that there will be many who desire to enter, but few will enter through the narrow door. Luke explores the cost of following Jesus.

Recognize The Cost

The scene begins with great crowds following Jesus. Jesus turns and addresses the crowd that is accompanying him. Jesus tells them that they must hate their families and their own lives to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus is teaching that a disciple must forsake all relationships and desires. "Hate" does not mean we are to have an emotional hate toward our family, but that we will love them less than Jesus. Following Jesus is the disciple's first love. Following Jesus is to have priority over any family member and one's own life. Other concerns take second place to following Jesus. Discipleship is a call to allegiance. Jesus is to have first place over all, including family.

At that time, a Jewish person who made a choice for Jesus would alienate his family. A decision for Christ marked a person and automatically came with a cost. The point is that only when one forsakes all others is one following Jesus, otherwise something else will have a greater pull on one's allegiances than Jesus does.

Jesus must mean more to us than our families, no matter how much we love them. There are times when our love for our families tries to get in the way of our love for Jesus. It does this when we let our parents discourage us from making a complete commitment to Christ. It does when a marriage turns inward instead of outward to serve others out of the strength of a godly partnership, or when we have an idolatrous attachment to our children and their activities, with little time left over to show mercy or share the gospel. Jesus is telling us not to let the claims that our families make on us interfere with the claims that he makes on us. Many temptations come with focusing on our family, and our love for Jesus must take precedence over everything. Unless Jesus is our highest affection, we cannot be his disciples. We must love Jesus more.

Self-denial is also part of the cost. We must love Jesus more than our own being. The process of discipleship is stressed here, not the decision to enter into it (verbs are in the present tense in verse 27). To follow Jesus means we will follow in suffering because the world rejects the disciple of Jesus. Bearing the cross means we are willing to bear the pain of persecution as a result of following Jesus. Discipleship is not an invitation to ease and comfort but demands sacrifice and suffering. Discipleship involves more than showing up. Jesus is calling for a passionate pursuit of him. Only a passionate pursuit will have the dedication and resolve to give up anything to be with Jesus.

Jesus does not remove the cost of following him, but explains the cost. Unlike churches today that try to eliminate all the costs so that it is easy to follow, but this is not being a disciple of Jesus but a disciple of self. Christianity today is being promoted as glorified, holy coffeehouses where you can get your coffee, listen to some music, and be entertained. We must offer nothing more than Jesus. What more is there to offer? Bringing people in with anything else to not make disciples of Jesus, but disciples of self.

Assessing The Cost

Jesus gives two illustrations concerning the need to assess the cost of following Jesus. The first illustration is of building a tower. The tower here likely does not refer to a fortress tower, but one more like a farming building. A parallel would be building an addition to one's house. Not counting the cost

means the project will not be completed. The building will stand unfinished, as a monument to one's foolishness. Jesus declares that one must assess whether one is ready to take on the personal commitment and sacrifice required to follow Jesus. Following Jesus is not an invitation to an ice cream social. Jesus has described the cost of following him, recognizing that all other concerns take second place to following Jesus. The Christian life will cost us everything to follow him. Therefore, we need to sit down and decide whether we can pay that price.

The second illustration is fairly similar and it concerns a king going to war. A king must calculate the cost before going into the battle. To avoid an embarrassing and deadly outcome, one is to count the cost. It is foolish to not consider what it will take to be a disciple. But there is an interesting depth that is found in the illustration. The king must consider what the cost will be for not allying himself with the more powerful king. Verse 32 makes this point. If the king recognizes he will not be successful, then he will wisely send a delegation for peace. Faced with the threat of a superior army, the weaker party should consider his resources carefully before deciding to defend himself. We must consider the cost of non-discipleship. The first question we must ask is whether we can afford to follow Jesus. The next question we must ask is whether we can afford not to follow Jesus.

Recognize The Cost

Therefore, we must carefully consider what Jesus is asking us to do and recognize what it will cost us if we do not follow him. First, the cost is stated again in verse 33. If we do not renounce all that we have we cannot be his disciple. We are called to give up all that we have. At the beginning of this teaching Jesus said that we have to give up family and we have to give up ourselves. We have to give up our very lives. We must give up everything to be a follower of Jesus. There is nothing that we get to keep for ourselves. There is nothing that is not required to be placed on the altar before the Lord. Jesus is not asking us to make room in our lives for him. He is telling us to get rid of everything to follow him. We cannot think that what God is asking of us is small. We do a great disservice to the world if we indicate that entering the kingdom of God is easy and following Jesus is simple. We are deceiving people if we suggest that a person does not have to do much to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus says we must give up everything. We can hold nothing back. There is nothing we get to keep in our hands. In our previous study I tried to make the point that anything we are holding back, giving our attention to, or trying to keep is an idol. We are declaring that the person, object, or activity is more important than Jesus. We are treasuring something or loving someone more than Jesus. We must renounce all things, all pursuits, all comforts, all desires, all causes, all crusades, and efforts and subject them to Jesus. Being a disciple requires the abandonment of all projects, plans, and personal goals. Otherwise we are not his disciple. It is not a question of how little one can give but how much does God deserve. He deserves everything we are, everything we have, and everything we cherish and prize.

Second, we must consider the cost of not following Jesus. Look at verses 34-35. If salt is no longer salt, what is it good for? Salt that has lost its saltiness has no value. It cannot be used for anything. Carefully read the words: "It is thrown away." That salt is cast out. The cost of not following Jesus is enormous. You will be cast out. You will be cast out of God's presence. You will be cast out of his kingdom. You will be cast into the lake of fire. You will be cast into eternal torment. You will be cast into the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Conclusion

Grace comes with demands. Jesus expects nothing that he has not already accepted for himself. If you are a disciple, do not quit. Everyone quits today. Everything that matters is hard and costly. Do not quit. Things get tough and too often we quit because it is hard. Younger generations truly reflect this.

You are going to face pressure to not intensely follow Jesus. One of the purposes of our community groups is to help each other to not quit. But count the cost of not following Jesus. You will lose everything anyway. You will lose everything that matters to you.

Lost
Luke 15

Luke 15 is one of the most well-known parables of Jesus. But in all the teaching that has been done from this parable, I fear that the main point of the parable has been missed. Great lessons and truthful teachings have come from this parable. But it is important that we do not miss the point of what Jesus is teaching. Let's make some initial observations before we dig deep into Jesus' teaching.

Verse 3 tells us that Jesus told them this parable. Notice that the text does not say that Jesus told three parables or four parables, depending on how you want to break these things up. This is one long parable. Notice the connective words in verses 8 and 11. The text does not reveal that Jesus is telling new parables at these points. Rather, Jesus keeps on speaking. The teaching continues. The three stories are one parable and should not be broken apart from each other.

We also need to consider that this is a parable and not an allegory. It is very tempting to use this parable as an allegory where every part of the story has a spiritual meaning. Therefore, teachers will offer a lesson on the father in this story and offer a separate lesson on the lost son. But the father and the lost son in this story are not the point of the parable. While we learn beautiful truths about God through the story concerning the father, these truths were not the point of the parable. Now with fresh eyes and renewed attention let us dig into this parable.

The Cause of the Parable (15:1-2)

Before we dive into any parable we need to observe the occasion of the parable, but this will give us guidance on what we are to look for as we study. We saw this with the parable of the good Samaritan. When the occasion for the parable is missed, the point of the parable is also easily missed. Luke 15:1 tells us that tax collectors and sinners were coming to listen to Jesus teach. What a terrific outcome! Sinners and crooks are coming to listen to the teachings of Jesus. However, the Pharisees and the scribes were complaining. How can they be complaining? Listen to their complaint: "This man receives sinners and eats with them." This supposed teacher sent from God is welcoming and accepting sinners. Now consider how Luke is connecting an important theme in this part of his gospel. Luke 14 taught that God wants a full house for his banquet. The servant was commanded to go into the streets and hedges compelling people to come to the feast (14:23). God does not want people to be lost. But people who refuse to enter the feast will not enjoy the privilege of God's kingdom. God will make the offer to all people to enter his kingdom for a relationship with the Father. This is the cause of the parable. The religious leaders are complaining about Jesus welcoming sinners to hear him teach.

Lost Sheep (15:3-7)

The first movement of the parable concerns a lost sheep. The shepherd has 100 sheep but one is now missing. Notice the observation in the first movement of the story: who doesn't go after the one who is lost! Then notice the key point: who doesn't call together his friends and neighbors for rejoicing? In the same way, there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. This is a very big deal to God. God wants people to be in his kingdom. God wants people to be saved. He does not want anyone to be lost. Therefore, there is cheering and rejoicing in heaven when a sinner repents.

Lost Coin (15:8-10)

The second movement of the parable concerns a woman who has lost a valuable coin. She has ten coins but now one is missing. Notice the observation in the second movement of the story: who doesn't go after the one who is lost! Then notice the key point: who doesn't call together his friends and

neighbors for rejoicing? In the same way, there is joy in heaven, even in the presence of the spiritual beings, over one sinner who repents.

Lost Son (15:11-24)

In the third movement of the parable, we read about the lost son. Jesus has told the first two stories to set us up with some expectations for how this third part of the parable will go. What the son does is awful. To ask for your inheritance is like telling your father that you wish he was dead. What you are saying is that you have no interest in a relationship with your father, you just want the money he can give you. There is no doubt this is every person. Every person has been rebellious to God. Every person has used God for the blessings that he offers, often with no desire for a relationship with him. We want life, possessions, wealth, and relationships, but not the God who gives those things. We see ourselves even more in the description of how this younger son is living his life in reckless living. Consider that any type of living apart from a relationship with the Father is reckless living. He is throwing away the blessings of the father through his wild lifestyle.

The next great scene to the story is repentance. Verse 17 are beautiful words, "But when he came to himself." Reality finally strikes and he realizes what he has done. He realizes what he has said to his father. He realizes he is wasting his life in foolish living. Notice the humility found in his repentance: "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." This is what must happen for all people. At a moment in time there needs to be a "coming to ourselves." We need to wake up from the darkness of this world and realize what we have done. We are sitting with the pigs when we could be sitting in the Father's house. Repentance is recognizing the error of our ways and turning back to the Father in humility. This is what the son does.

Based upon what we read in the first two movements of this parable, what is going to be the reaction of the father? The first two parts of the story showed both seeking the lost sheep/coin and rejoicing when the sheep/coin was found. We know what we are going to read with the father of this lost son who comes back. Therefore, we see this love in verse 20. The father sees his son returning, feels compassion, runs, and embraces his son. Further, the father calls for the best robe, a ring on the son's hand, shoes on his feet, and killing the fattened calf. Notice the words, "Let us eat and celebrate." The return of the lost is a celebration. The word is used again in verse 24, "And they began to celebrate." This should be the end of the parable. However, it is not and the reason is because the religious leaders are complaining at him because he is welcoming sinners.

The Older Son (15:25-32)

What was the reaction of the older son when he heard the news that his brother had returned? "But he was angry and refused to go in." The father comes out and urged the son to come into the celebration. Why is the older brother upset. Verses 29-30 give the reasoning. The problem is that he doesn't think he has received anything like what the younger son has received. He wasted your inheritance with prostitutes and you killed the fattened calf and threw a party when he came back. I have not wasted your inheritance and have been slaving for you these many years and what have you done for me? The older son does not think this is fair. He is thinking about himself and stubbornly refuses to enter because these sinners are entering into the kingdom of the Father.

I love the Father's response. Verses 31-32 are the critical teaching point of the parable. Please consider that the final words of a parable typically contain the point of the teaching. "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours." The father says to his older son, "You have everything. What are upset about?" How can you be upset at this celebration over the lost one returning? You have everything the father has. The older son sees that a fattened calf had not been killed for him. The older

son failed to see that he had everything. All that the father possesses is ours. How can you be upset when the lost return? You are already experiencing everything the father has to offer.

Please notice verse 32. "It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found." The sheep was lost and was found. Therefore a celebration takes place. The coin was lost and was found. Therefore a celebration takes place. The lost soul was lost and was found. Further, he was dead but now is alive. He was eternally lost, separated from God. But now he is alive. He has been restored. Life has been returned to him. It is time to celebrate!

Life Lessons

Welcome. Jesus welcomes sinners. Do we welcome sinners? Do we look at sinners with disdain like the Pharisees did or do we welcome them? We need to show our guests that we want them here. We want everyone to be here. There is no better place and no other place they should go.

Seek. In the parable we see three times the seeking of that which was lost. Not only do we welcome sinners but we must seek the lost. God goes to great effort to seek the lost. He sent his Son to die for sins. He spares the world of judgment because he wants the lost to return.

Celebrate. In the parable we see three times the celebration that is appropriate and fitting because the lost has returned. The dead have come to life. We must celebrate when the lost come to the Lord. It is a glorious day deserving of our praise, our singing, our cheering, our joy, and our excitement. Do not be self-righteous. We are no more deserving of the blessings of God than anyone else. Further, see that we are presently enjoying everything the Father has and desire to share those blessings with others.

This section of the gospel of Luke is continuing to ask and answer the question: who is in the kingdom of God? Who is receiving salvation? Who is experiencing the blessings that come from a covenant relationship with God? Jesus is going to tell another parable and verse 1 tells us that he is teaching his disciples. However, others are listening. Verse 14 tells us that the Pharisees also heard these things that Jesus is teaching. With this audience in mind, let's study the parable.

The Parable (16:1-8)

First we need to understand what is happening in the parable so we can understand the point Jesus is making. The parable is of a manager who is running the property and possessions of a rich man. However, he has been mismanaging those possessions and is going to be fired. The manager finds out that the rich man knows how he has been wasting his possessions. Knowing he is about to be fired, he comes up with a plan, since he cannot do physical labor and is too ashamed to beg. He calls in the people who have debts to the rich man and discounts their debts. They do not know this manager is about to be fired. It appears to them that he is being generous and kind. So he instructs each debtor to cut his debt by a significant portion. You may have a footnote in your Bible pointing out how much or how expensive these debts were. The amount of the reduction would have been valued at about 16 months of wages. Now why does this manager do this? You can read all sorts of books trying to justify what this manager did, that the rich man was illegally charging interest and so he was cutting the interest or things like that. But this misses the point of the parable. The reason the manager reduced their bills was so he would have favors to pull when he got fired. He was going to go back to these people and tell them to remember how he saved them a year and a half of wages and to help him out financially. He is making preparations for the moment of his termination. He knows he will no longer have income but has come up with a plan to be financially secure when that time comes. Verse 8 sounds fairly shocking, but the master is not commending the manager for ripping him off. He is commending him for being clever. His dishonesty is not applauded, but his quick thinking and cleverness to make sure that preparations were made.

This is how unbelievers typically operate. The people of this world are very shrewd and clever in how they deal with each other. We certainly see this in our business world today. People are usually very skillful at doing things for their own advantage. Lacking a godly conscience or compass, the people of this world concentrate their energy on getting ahead in life. So is Jesus teaching his disciples to be more shrewd and dishonest like this manager so that you take advantage of others? Not at all. Verses 9-13 contain the explanation to the parable.

The Parable Explained (16:9-13)

Verse 9 lays out the point of the parable and the key teaching of Jesus. Use your worldly wealth and possessions in such a way so that you will be received into eternal dwellings. Do you see the parallel to the parable? The manager used the possessions in such a way so that when he lost his job he would have people who would receive him into their homes. In the same way, we are commanded to use our wealth and possessions in such a way so that we will be received into the eternal home. Please notice the certainty Jesus places on this commanded. Underline the phrase, "when it fails." Your wealth and possessions are going to fail. We already experience this to a degree because it always seems like when we start to make headway with having money, something happens and it is gone. Notice Jesus does not say, "if your wealth fails." He says, "When it fails." Wealth and possessions are useless on the day of

judgment. Therefore use your wealth so that you are received into the eternal home. Use wealth, but don't worship wealth. It is an interesting irony to me that our money, one of our primary idols today, reads, "In God We Trust." Today it would be more accurate if the words read, "In this god we trust." The parable is teaching us to have the wisdom to recognize that wealth will fail us and therefore we must be shrewd to act so that we have a home on that day.

Verses 10-11 give the reasoning why we need to do this. If we have shown ourselves to be faithful with this material wealth (which is the "very little" in verse 10), then we will be entrusted with true riches (which is the "very much" in verse 10). Notice how verse 12 amplifies this thought. **The wealth you have is not yours.** It all belongs to God. If you have been shown to be unfaithful with this wealth now, then God will not give you your own reward at the end. Being faithful in small things like money demonstrates to God that we are ready to handle the more important things, the "true things" of God. If we are not good caretakers of what God has given us now, how can we expect anything from God in the life to come?

Verse 13 closes the parable with beautiful words. No slave can be a slave to two masters. It is simply not possible. You cannot pursue one without neglecting the other. As followers of Christ, our love for Jesus is going to cause us to miss out on opportunities for financial gain. We only can have one real pursuit. We will lose work, lose money, lose opportunities, lose promotions, and more because we serve only one master.

Life Lessons From The Parable

1. The inevitability of having to give an account to God. When we know our end is coming, it changes how we act. All of us talk about if we knew we only had a certain amount of time left to live, how we would live differently? In the parable, when the manager finds out he is going to be held accountable and fire, he starts acting differently, making preparations for the time of his accountability. We must live in the reality that we will each give an account to God. Further, we are going to give an account on how we used the wealth and possessions God gave us. Most of God's people live as if there will not be a day to stand before him and give an account. This is an enormous mistake. Those who are unfaithful in discharging their duties on earth must not expect to have heavenly treasure.

2. How can I as one of the children of light make the best use of money now so that when I die I will receive an eternal home with God? We need to constantly ask ourselves what we should be doing with our wealth and possessions so that God will receive us into the eternal dwellings. When I know I am going to give an account, then this question will be at the forefront of our minds every day. What am I doing with my wealth to enter eternal dwellings? Am I using my wealth to make friends with God?

This is a very important consideration for a number of reasons. We need to see that giving loosens the grip that wealth has on our hearts. God is not interested in us just being good doers. There are plenty of people who use their wealth for good causes and to help people. That is not what Jesus means. He is not speaking merely of charity or philanthropy. Giving checks that we are not slaves to wealth. Giving to God and his purposes reveals that we are slaves of God. Does our use of wealth reflect our spiritual priorities? We need to ask ourselves how God wants us to spend his money. If Jesus set your budget, what would be different? How does God want us to spend his wealth that he has given you? One of the subtle but important points in these parables is that the parables always teach God as the master and giver of wealth. Everything belongs to him and we are simply stewards and managers of his blessings.

3. What is your response? Look at verses 14-17. The Pharisees heard this teaching and ridiculed Jesus because their hearts were corrupted by the love of money. You can fool people but you cannot fool God (16:15). God knows your heart. You can reject this message. You can choose to not believe this

message. But God knows your heart. You are not going to force your way into this kingdom if your heart is captured by the deceitfulness of riches. God's message does not change and does not pass away. The love of wealth, which is exalted by people, is an abomination to God. How we use our money reveals what is in our hearts. Do not reject or ridicule this message. Listen to the weight of Jesus' words. God cares how you spend his money. God cares how you use his possessions. The wealth God has given to us must reflect our spiritual priorities.

Is Divorce Okay?
Luke 16:16-18

In the previous section of Luke 16 we noticed Jesus teaching about the need to use wealth in a way that prepares us to enter into our eternal home. The Pharisees reject Jesus because he is teaching something they do not accept. They are lovers of money (16:14) and choose to ridicule Jesus rather than listen to the clear teaching concerning who will enter the kingdom of God. Lovers of money will not enter the kingdom. Those who use the wealth given by God for godly means will enter the kingdom. Further, these people tried to show others that they were godly, but the Lord knows the heart.

Entering The Kingdom (16:16-17)

Jesus makes an interesting observation about the hearts of people toward God. Many people try to enter the kingdom of God by their own laws and rules. But the law of God cannot be circumvented. The teachings from the Law of Moses are now being fulfilled in the kingdom of Christ. Nothing of the Law of Moses is being tossed aside. The Law of Moses finds its fulfillment in Jesus. In fact, all of the teachings from the Law and the Prophets were pointing to these days when Jesus would come and bring the kingdom of God. For the people to obey God's law, they must embrace Jesus' kingdom message.

God's Marriage Law (16:18)

A classic example of where people were trying to force themselves into the kingdom of God is concerning God's marriage law. A popular distortion of Deuteronomy 24 that was taught by the Jews in the days of Jesus was that a man would divorce his wife for nearly any cause, including ruining a meal or if he found a better looking woman. The same issue is a question today. Is divorce okay? This was a law that the Pharisees tried to minimize. Jesus uses God's marriage law as another example where people think they are part of the kingdom of God, when in fact they are simply trying to force their way in, but do not belong. Let's look at God's marriage law.

Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. (Luke 16:18 ESV)

I think we can see why Jesus would use this as another law to be obeyed concerning the kingdom of God. This is another command that people ridicule and try to get around. Just as people ridicule Jesus because they love money and do not want to use the wealth that they have received from God as a way to prepare for eternal life, people do not want to hear and obey God's marriage law.

Let's start with the first word, "Everyone." Everyone is included in the word "everyone." No one is exempt. This is not a teaching from the Law of Moses, though we can see that this was God's marriage law in the first covenant. This is not a teaching for the Jews alone, though the Jews were certainly under this law. This is the law of the kingdom of God. This law applies to every person and everyone who ignore this law cannot belong to the kingdom of God. If we know the scriptures then we will not be surprised by the words of Jesus condemning divorce and remarriage.

So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. "For I hate divorce!" says the LORD, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife." (Malachi 2:15-16 NLT)

No where can you find in the scriptures God authorizing or commending divorce for any cause. Marriage is permanent, a covenant between man, woman, and God, that is not to be broken. Notice that Jesus does not say, "Divorce happens. What can you do?" To divorce and remarry is to commit adultery. Divorce and remarriage is not merely a bad idea. Divorce and remarriage is not something that God

doesn't really like. God hates it! It is adultery. Recall the words of the apostle Paul to the Christians in Corinth:

Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9–10 NLT)

This is what Luke is showing us in this section of chapters. Who are those who are in the kingdom of God? Those who are in the kingdom of God are people who do not disregard God's marriage law. We cannot be committing adultery and be joined with Christ in his kingdom. This is the point that Jesus wants these people to hear who were ignoring God's permanent and unchanging marriage law.

Consider why Jesus calls this adultery and not sexual immorality. Adultery means having sexual relations with a person who is not your spouse. So how could divorcing and marrying another be committing adultery? The answer is that you have legally divorced from a person and legally married another, you are still bound by God to your first spouse. Adultery has occurred because you are violating the permanent marriage covenant that you entered into with your spouse and your God. You have left your spouse and married again in violation of God's law. Paul uses this truth as an illustration in Romans 7.

For example, when a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her. So while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery if she married another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries. (Romans 7:2–3 NLT)

Paul confirms the teaching of Jesus. Once we are married, we are to remain married to that person as long as that person lives. Most, if not all, said those very words in their vows that were made during the wedding ceremony.

If there was any question about what Jesus is saying, he makes his point all the more clear in the next phrase. **"He who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."** Not only is the person who leaves his spouse and marries another committing adultery, but the person who chooses to marry a divorced person is also committing adultery. You are marrying and having relations with a person who is bound to another spouse. You also are committing adultery when you marry a person who is divorced. The principle of marriage is clear from Genesis 2 and remains throughout the scriptures through today and into the future. One man and one woman are joined for life. If you destroy a marriage, you don't get to have another one. The law of marriage can be summarized with two points: Divorce plus remarriage is adultery and marrying the divorced is adultery.

Too many churches are not teaching this truth. Too many churches fail to recognize how many people are in unlawful marriages. To keep the peace and to keep attendance high, many churches are proud to declare that they will not teach on this topic. But this is not the proper way to handle God's word. God's message cannot be hidden just because it may be difficult or uncomfortable. Think about the placement of this teaching in Luke's gospel. Many cannot see the connection to the surrounding text. But the context is fitting to the Pharisees who are ignoring Jesus' kingdom message. They are ridiculing and ignoring the gospel message, rather than listening, learning, and changing their hearts and actions so as to enter the kingdom of God. The same problem continues today. I want to encourage you to consider that if you are attending a church that does not teach every verse of God's word or distorts this clear teaching, then you need to leave that place. They have become like these Pharisees and are ignoring the message of the kingdom. You need to hear every word of Jesus.

Answering Common Questions

Allow me to quickly answer a couple commonly asked questions that come from this teaching. First, what if your spouse commits adultery against you? Jesus is clear in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 that this is the only cause given by God that the one cheated against had the right to divorce and marry another. **“But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 5:32 ESV)** The one cheated against does not have to divorce and remarry, but is given the right to do so.

Some will ask, “Can I divorce as long as I do not remarry?” Jesus and Paul answer this question clearly.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Matthew 19:5–6 ESV) **To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10–11 NIV 2011)**

Do not separate from your spouse. Divorce is still a sin. Further, the apostle Paul says that if you are divorced, you only have two choices: to remain unmarried or be reconciled (7:11). Divorce is a sin, but if you have already divorced, then you must stay unmarried or reconcile with the person you divorced.

Some think that they can be separated but will not get a legal divorce. In this way they think they are getting around God’s law. However, the apostle Paul condemned this also in 1 Corinthians 7:2-6.

But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. (1 Corinthians 7:2–6 ESV)

Separation is a sin and so is divorce. Neither of these are God’s answer to marital troubles and difficulties.

Conclusion

Being in the kingdom is to have the heart of obedience, not a heart that seeks loopholes. Remember what we learn back in the thirteenth chapter of Luke. Many are seeking to enter, but few strive to enter. Few are willing to give up everything to enter the kingdom of God. God’s marriage law often becomes an obstacle to people that is too great to pay. Many are unwilling to accept Jesus’ teaching, will find another church, and pretend they are Christians, believing they can force their way into Jesus’ kingdom. But it is a delusion. You may be seeking, but you are not striving and willing to give up everything to enter this glorious kingdom.

If you are having marriage problems and want to know God’s will, please meet with our shepherds and with myself and we would be happy to listen to your situation so that we can help you do what is right before God. We want you to be part of God’s kingdom. If you have been divorced, please meet with us so that we can help you in your circumstance. If you have been divorced and are now remarried to another, again we want you here. We are not asking you to leave. We are not drawing a line in the sand. We want you to know the truth of God’s message. Come to me or our shepherds and request a

time that we can sit down together and talk about your circumstances. We do not pretend to suggest that these are easy situations, nor that the solutions are easy. We are dealing with people and we are dealing with sins that occurred in a marriage. We want to help you understand God's word so you can apply it properly to your life. But your soul and your eternal home is far more important than our temporary stay on this earth. Please meet with us and let us help you.

Rich In Death Luke 16:19-31

Luke continues to tell the scene as Jesus is teaching his disciples about using money to be friends of God. Jesus taught the disciples that everything we have is God's and we are to be good managers of God's wealth. The Pharisees were listening to Jesus' teaching and ridiculed Jesus for teaching this message. But Luke tells us the reason why they ridiculed and rejected the message was not because the teaching was false, but because they loved money and this teaching cut them. Jesus turns to them and tells them that God knows their hearts and they cannot force their way into the kingdom of God. You cannot come to God on your terms. You do not enter his covenant on your terms. You enter on God's terms, obeying what he has told you to do. Jesus is not teaching a new message, but the message that the Law and the Prophets taught for centuries. This leads us to Luke 16:19-31 where Jesus speaks about the rich man and Lazarus.

Actual or parable? The first debate that immediately occurs is whether the rich man and Lazarus are actual people or is this only a parable. We need to make a couple observations about this question. First, Jesus does not say it is a parable. Luke has often introduced Jesus' teachings with the words, "And he told them his parable." But Luke does not always do this even though a parable is being spoken (cf. Luke 16:1). Second, if this is a parable, then this is the only time where the characters in the parable are given a name. This is a fairly compelling consideration. Why name the person if he did not exist? So there are some reasons to take this as an account of actual events. However, whichever way we understand this story does not change its impact or meaning. We must also consider that the phrasing is the same as Luke 16:1. Jesus begins in 16:19, "There was a rich man who" and Luke 16:1 begins, "There was a rich man who." So it sounds like this is another parable of Jesus. Even if this is a parable, Jesus never told parables that were not grounded in the truth. Jesus never told fables or myths. Every parable he told has grounded in spiritual reality. This story is not a fantasy. Jesus is speaking about the eternal destination of two people and what they experience. The descriptions of the afterlife and its impact on these two people is true. One important proof of this point is to recognize that the point of Jesus' teaching is not to tell everyone about what will happen after death. The point is noticing **who** was in each place, not **what** each place was like. Therefore, our lesson today will have two parts. This story gives us the most information about what happens when we die. Therefore, the first part of today's lesson will look at what happens after death. In the second part of today's lesson we will then examine the point of Jesus' teaching — who is going to torment and who is going to comfort.

Hades: Paradise and Torment

Verse 23 describes the location where the rich man has gone as Hades. Hades was understood to be the realm of departed spirits. Lazarus dies and the rich man dies. Please notice that physical death is not the end of existence. There is something after death. Though the physical body died, Lazarus is with Abraham. Lazarus is described as being in Abraham's bosom (vs. 22) being comforted (vs. 25). In the same way, though the rich man died and was buried, his existence was not over either. The rich man is described as being in torment (vs. 23) and in anguish (vs. 24, 25). When we die, we will either go to eternal comfort or go to eternal torment. There is not a waiting period or a sleep period. This fits what Jesus said to the criminal on the cross, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." At the moment of death, our spirits are sent to paradise and comfort or torment and anguish.

The other important observation to make about life after death is that there is no changing of the outcome. Notice in verse 26 that there is no switching between these two realms. Once one is in comfort, that person remains in eternal comfort. Once one is in torment, that person remains in eternal

torment. Jesus ends the idea that you can suffer punishment for a definite period of time and then go to comfort. It also ends the idea that you suffer punishment for a definite period of time and then go out of existence. There is nothing in the scriptures to suggest or hint at the idea that hell is temporary or that a person pays for your sins and then your eternal existence ends or changes to be in eternal life. This idea comes from a false notion that we need to consider: none of us can pay for our sins. The reason we need Jesus is because we cannot make payment for our sins. If we could pay for our sins, we would not need Jesus. We could just go to torment, pay for our sins, then go to comfort. But this is false. We cannot pay for our sins. We are receiving what we deserve in torment and there is no end to that torment. You will not go out of existence. You will not later go to eternal comfort. There is no opportunity to cross over. Listen very carefully: there are no second chances. Your whole life is your opportunity to decide. Your whole life contains hundreds of thousands and millions of opportunities to repent and turn to God. Once we die, our opportunity has passed. Now let's move to the point of Jesus' teaching: who are those who will experience this torment and who will experience this comfort?

Wealth Poorly Used

This is an example of the teaching found in Luke 16:1-13. The rich man did not make friends with God so that he would be received into eternal dwellings. He used his wealth as if it were his own. Notice verse 19. This rich man has the expensive clothes and eats the best meals. He is living in luxury and comfort. In front of his very gate is a person who is covered in sores and would have been happy just to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. The rich man has all that he needs and Lazarus has nothing. What did the rich man do for Lazarus? What did he do to help him? Apparently absolutely nothing. He walked right by Lazarus, completely unconcerned.

Notice the eternal reversal in this story. While on the earth, the rich man had everything he needed and wanted. Lazarus had neither while on earth. Listen to Abraham's words in verse 25. Now Lazarus is comforted and the rich man is in anguish. This is an enormous reversal. The attitude in that day was if you had possessions and wealth that you were in God's favor and would go to eternal comfort and life. However, the poor were supposed by the people to be sinners who would not find eternal comfort. Jesus turns the tables on this thinking. The poor and destitute may very well be people of God who will receive comfort eternally. Just because you are rich does not mean you are in the kingdom of God. Being in the kingdom of God is not determined by being rich or poor, but is determined by what you do with the wealth God has given you to manage. Wealth is not a barometer of one's standing before God. One's fate is determined by one's mercy to others, not by physical lineage to Abraham. (Notice how the rich man calls Abraham, "Father Abraham." Our actions determine our outcome, not lineage.)

The story is not about solving world hunger or ending poverty. So often we think about doing good for people we get caught into thinking about large scale action. We do not need to fund food banks or work at soup kitchens. That is not the point of the story. The story is about the hunger of one man who sat on the rich man's doorstep. The story is not about being part of some large scale answer to the world's economic troubles. The story is asking us what are we doing with our wealth toward the people right in front of our eyes. Is the wealth that we are managing completely consumed on ourselves? Or are we using the wealth God has given us to do good wherever and whenever possible?

Severity of Missing God's Kingdom

Notice the severity of the judgment against the rich man. The imagery that Jesus uses tries to press into our hearts how awful it is to not belong to his kingdom when we die. Jesus describes what the rich man is experiencing as torment, anguish, needing mercy, and in anguish in this flame. It is an awful picture of suffering once we die.

The anguish is so great that the rich man does not want any of his family to join him. He begs for Abraham to send him back, not so that he can right his wrongs, but to warn his brothers to change their lives so they will not go to eternal punishment like him. Abraham makes it clear that we have all the information and evidence we need to make the proper decision. You have the word of God. You have revealed to you what will happen when you die. If you will not believe God's word, then nothing is going to sway you. Nothing else can change your mind except listening to God's word. It does not matter if someone rose from the dead, we will not believe. Now, I think we read that and think that we would change our minds if someone rose from the dead. But we are fooling ourselves and know that we would not believe because someone did rise from the dead. Jesus rose from the dead and yet people still do not believe. The evidence is weighty and hundreds of people saw Jesus rise from the dead. Yet people do not believe. We have been given God's word and it tells us what happens after death. There are no other signs needed. There are no other signs or revelations that will come.

Not only is God begging you to repent before it is too late, but every family member, friend, and loved one you ever knew who died outside of Christ is begging you also. None of them want you to come with them. If they could come back and warn you, they would. But you have been given all you need to know and decide. There is not a single person who would want you to experience eternal punishment. It is not a happy thought. It is not something that we like to dwell on. We want to preach everyone into heaven. We ease our consciences by assuming that everyone is saved that we know and they are in heaven being comforted. But Luke has shown us through the teaching of Jesus that few will be saved and only those who are striving will enter. The dead are crying to you to listen to this warning and repent.

Increase Our Faith
Luke 17:1-6

There are many teachings and commands of Jesus that are simply difficult to consistently obey. Jesus offers one of those challenges in this section of Luke's gospel. Jesus begins by letting us know that temptations are going to come. Regardless of how much we grow, how much we read the scriptures, and pray, temptations are going to come. Satan is coming after us. Coming to Jesus and becoming a follower of him does not mean that you will have an easy life. The temptations you are fighting you will still have to fight. Satan is still going to try to exploit your weaknesses and vices.

Don't Cause Temptations (17:1-3)

But woe to us if we are the cause of the temptation. Jesus says it would be a better deal for us to drown in the sea than cause someone to sin. Anything would be better than what God is going to do to us if we have caused another person to fall into sin. Jesus is opening our eyes to realize that each of us is vulnerable to sin. New Christians are highly vulnerable. Weak Christians are vulnerable. All of us have areas that are difficulties and weaknesses. We need to open our eyes and hearts to understand that you cannot say and do anything you want. Just because you don't have a problem with something does not mean someone else does not. We need to be very careful what we say. We can say such hurtful things and not realize the amount of damage and faith shaking that is being caused. Too many teachers and preachers of the gospel have overreacted to a misunderstanding, poorly said words, and even false understandings so as to destroy the faith of another. Do we think God is pleased when we ruin the faith of another? We need to be considerate in our dress. Modesty is a problem today and the sin of lust is running rampant. It is a growing sin area for men and women. We need to be careful what we are wearing. We need to watch how we act. Things that we think are liberties and rights can often be used to harm the faith of others. Jesus wants us to understand the seriousness of causing temptations for others. Therefore, we need to pay attention to ourselves. Look at what you are doing! Look at what you are saying! Your own soul is not the only concern, but also the souls of others. Jesus says drowning is a better deal than what we will receive from God if we are a cause for sin.

Correct and Forgive (17:3-4)

Jesus now gives the directions of how we are to proceed in our treatment of one another. If one of our Christian brothers or sisters sins, we are to rebuke that person. Jesus teaches an important principle that we are to share in each other's commitment to pursue righteousness. We are to be working together in growing our faith. We need to recognize that the word "rebuke" has probably developed too much of a negative connotation in our minds. Many people think of rebuking as yelling at people and being ugly and rude to others. The BDAG lexicon gives the primary definition of this Greek word that is translated "rebuke" as, "to express strong disapproval of someone." BDAG goes on to say that this is done, "in order to prevent an action or bring one to an end." This is a great summary of what admonishing one another, rebuking one another, and correcting one another looks like. We teach and preach in order to prevent sinful actions or to bring sinful actions to an end. We are to be involved in each other's lives so that we can assist one another in growing our faith and steering clear of sin. Christianity is not a private affair.

The hope of our correction is to bring about repentance in the one who has sinned. It is important to observe the order of Jesus' teaching. Jesus does not say that if a brother sins that you are supposed to immediately forgive them. The reason is that we are not helping the sinner when we do this. If we just forgive, then how with the sinner know he or she has sinned? What good is it? If we care about the

person's soul then we will want to bring about correction so they do not continue of the path that is leading them to destruction. Notice that once repentance has been forged, then we are commanded to forgive. This is the exact same way that God forgives us. God calls us to repentance and when we repent, God forgives us. God does not forgive us first, for that would leave us on the path of sin going to our destruction. In the same way, when our brother receives the correction, we are to respond with forgiveness. Therefore, we need to be willing to go to each other, humbly, prayerfully, and carefully as we seek the spiritual well-being of one another.

Jesus illustrates how we should be desiring to forgive those who sin against us. In verse 4 he speaks of a scenario where a person sins against you seven times in one day. Even if that person wronged you seven times that day, if he turns to you seven times in repentance, then you are to forgive him. Imagine if we sinned against each other that many times in one day. How desirous would we be to forgive? I suppose we would begin to question the sincerity of a person's repentance. If you are truly sorry and truly repentant, why do you keep sinning against me? But go back to the first verse: temptations are sure to come. We are going to succumb to sin. When repentance is made, forgiveness is immediately given. This means we desire to offer forgiveness and that we have a forgiving heart. Sometimes we want to excuse ourselves from this command because of the nature of the sin. We sometimes think that certain sins are so egregious that we do not have to forgive. But Jesus does not list any sins that do not demand our forgiveness. Egregious, repetitive sin against us is to be forgiven every time the person returns in repentance. We are not to be judges of the heart but forgivers just as God in Christ forgave us (Ephesians 4:30).

Increase Our Faith (17:5-6)

At hearing this teaching, the apostles say the very same thing that I believe we have in our hearts: "Increase our faith." In other words, this is hard. This is difficult! The apostles recognize that they need to have a greater reliance and trust in God so that they can do the hard things God asks them to do. We need to see the same thing. It takes faith in God to not want to be punitive toward those who sin against us. It takes increasing faith to forgive people who harm us and sin against us. One writer said it well, "Faith enables us to trust God for all the uncertainties of the future, to provide what we need, even if we do not know how God will do it, to get past the hurt of sin and broken promises." It is a recognition that we need to deepen our faith in Jesus to be the forgiving disciples that Jesus describes. If what Jesus is commanding us to as forgivers seems too great, then it is a teaching to us that we need to grow in our faith. We are being pricked in the heart right now that we do not trust God deeply enough to let these things go. We give these offenses over to God and will not avenge ourselves. We will not retaliate. We will not act like the world when we are wronged. We will not be selfish. We will not harm others in return for how they have harmed us. We will trust in the Lord. We will believe in God's promises that, by not responding in kind but forgiving when they repent, we will maintain our relationship with our Father and that he will reward us for modeling ourselves after his Son.

Verse 6 contains a great truth for us today. A little bit of faith can accomplish a great deal. We may be looking at our lives and thinking that we cannot be that person. We cannot be the gentle corrector and faithful forgiver that Christ is commanding. A little bit of faith can accomplish a great deal. A growing faith in the Lord will lead to surprising results in a transformed life. We have a song that says these true words, "His power can make you want you ought to be."

What Does God Owe You? Luke 17:7-19

What does God owe you? The answer we give determines our whole perspective of life in this world. We might think that we should not experience suffering. We may think that we should have a long life, free from serious health problems. We think we should be married and have children. We think that we should outlive our children. We think that we should have wealth. We think we should own a house. We think we should have a good job where we are respected and appreciated. We have all of these kinds of expectations in life. I tell this story not to be humorous but to observe the thinking that we can so easily adopt. A woman came to be and her faith was broken and she was in turmoil because her pet had died. She was distraught because she did not understand how God could do that to her. So I ask the question again: what does God owe you?

Unworthy Slaves (17:7-10)

Notice the story Jesus tells about a master and his servant. When the servant is done plowing or keeping sheep, does the master tell the servant to sit at the table for dinner? Of course not, the master tells the servant to make the dinner and serve the master while he eats. After the master has had his meal, only then does the servant eat and drink. It is a pretty obvious picture. The servant waits on the master. The master does not wait on the servant. Further, the master does not thank the servant for his work. The servant is supposed to do what he was commanded. The master does not have to thank him for doing so. After eating a meal at a restaurant, have you ever gone back into the kitchen and thank the chef for the meal he prepared? Of course not, because that was his job. It is his duty to prepare the meal. That is what he gets paid to do. He does not need thanksgiving because he is simply doing his job. You do not thank the bag boy at the grocery store for bagging your groceries. You do not thank the clerk for scanning your groceries and taking your money. It is their job. Now listen to the point Jesus makes in verse 10.

So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty." (Luke 17:10 ESV)

Jesus says that when you have done everything that God has commanded you to do, here is what you are supposed to say: "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty." It is not the master's responsibility to make life easy for the servant. God does not exist to make our lives easier. It is the servant's responsibility to work hard for the master. After we have worked hard for the master, we have only done our duty.

We are not deserving of some sort of special recognition. We are not deserving of a pat on the back for the work we have done. If we had not done what we did, we would be a failure. We would be a rebellious servant. By doing all that God has commanded, we are simply being a servant. We are not anything special and have not done anything extraordinary. All our moral goodness merits nothing. All the good we can possibly do is only our duty. It is what we should have done! We must move our hearts and minds to the place where we understand that we deserve nothing from God and he demands everything from us. We are unworthy of any praise.

We are to have such a high view of Jesus that we make nothing of ourselves. Our high view of Jesus causes us to see ourselves as merely servants doing our duty. If we do not elevate Jesus to that level, then we come in with our pride and think that we are doing something special for God. If this sounds harsh, then it sounds harsh because we have self-righteous pride. We think we are something before God. We think that our actions are some kind of favor for God. We think that we are really doing something great when we come to worship, or do good for others, or some other godly act, when in

reality all that we have done is what we were supposed to do in the first place. "I forgave that person seven times today. How righteous and holy am I!" No, that is what you were supposed to do (17:4). Any good you do is what you were supposed to do. Stop acting like your good deeds and righteous acts are something special. Can you imagine the servant in the story going around thinking how awesome he was because he plowed the field and made the master dinner? What a fool! Those are your duties. That is what you were supposed to do. God owes us nothing! There is nothing we can do to put God in a position of owing us something. There is nothing we can do to place God in our debt. Jesus says in verse 10 that we are unworthy of any praise.

What We Owe God (17:11-19)

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus entered a village where he was met by ten lepers. We saw Jesus encounter a person with this serious skin disease back in Luke 5. Remember that the Law of Moses declared people with skin diseases unclean. Therefore, we see these ten lepers standing at a distance from Jesus, crying out to him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priest. Leviticus 14 instructed that those who were healed of skin diseases were to show themselves to the priests. Upon examination and an eight day cleansing ceremony, they would no longer be considered unclean and could reenter the community. So the ten leave, and as they go they are cleansed. This is an interesting miracle. Jesus does not immediately heal them and then tell them to see the priest. Rather, they are told to start going to the priest and along the way to see the priest, the ten are healed from this skin disease. This sounds like the end to a nice story. But the story has just begun.

In verse 15 we read that when one of the lepers realized he had been healed, turned back, praised God with a loud voice, and fell on his face at the feet of Jesus, giving him thanks. But Jesus is surprised. Where are the rest of the people who were healed? Where are the other nine? How many of us are like the nine who have received the blessings of God, but never thank God for what we have received? We are happy to receive blessings from God but do not see what God has done as mercy and grace. They see this as the right thing to have done for them. This is what God should have done for them. If they did not think this way, they would have also returned to Jesus, praising God, bowing before Jesus, and thanking him. The problem is self-righteous pride. God owes me this. One person of the ten realizes that God owes him nothing. He is the only one who returns to Jesus, praising God and giving thanks. Notice that he is a Samaritan. He is not presuming the grace of God or presuming a relationship with God. He understands that God owes him nothing, while the Jews thinking that God owes them something.

Consider how we do even worse than what we read in this event. Not only do we take the blessings of God, without giving thoughtful thanks to God and praising God for what he has done for us, but we complain about our blessings. We complain about what we have. We complain about how God is ruling in our lives. We complain to God, as if God owes us a particularly way of life. The nine think that God owed it to them to no longer be lepers. One realized that God did not owe him healing. God does not owe me wealth. God does not owe me health. God does not owe me a long life. Everything we have and everything we experience is a blessing of God. The breath we just took in is a blessing from God. Yet not only are we not grateful, we complain about the breath we just took.

Notice what Jesus says about this in verse 19: **And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." (Luke 17:19 ESV)** What a minute! Did Jesus heal all ten as they went on their way to show the priest. Yes, Jesus did. But only one of these ten received spiritual healing. Only one of these ten were saved from their sins. Many experienced the blessings of God, but only one was saved.

Luke's Teaching Point

Those who are saved, those who are truly healed, and those who are in the kingdom of God are those who recognize that God owes them nothing and owe God everything. Those in the kingdom realize that all our good deeds and righteous acts amount to nothing because that is what we were supposed to do. It is our duty. Therefore, all that we have and all the blessings of God are not due to us and are not owed to us. Everything is a gift of God's grace to us. Those in the kingdom of God see everything as God's grace, turn to Jesus, fall at his feet in submission, praising God and thanking him for what he has done for them.

We have been studying in this section of Luke's gospel about the kingdom of God. There have been two themes in this section: what is the kingdom of God and who belongs to the kingdom of God? Luke continues his instructions about the kingdom by noting the question of the Pharisees concerning the kingdom. The Pharisees ask when the kingdom of God would come. John the Baptizer had been proclaiming that the kingdom of God was near. Jesus has also been repeatedly teaching the nearness of the coming of the kingdom of God. Luke has emphasized this truth in a number of places throughout this gospel.

But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:27 ESV)

Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. 9 Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ 10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 11 ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ 12 I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. (Luke 10:8–12 ESV)

But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Luke 11:20 ESV)

Since the kingdom of God is near, the Pharisees want to know when this kingdom would come. Jesus answers this question in two sections, first to the Pharisees and second to his disciples.

The Nature of the Kingdom (17:20-21)

The rabbis taught that there would be great heavenly signs to signal the arrival of the kingdom. They desired to make calculations for the coming of the kingdom based upon various events that they saw (cf. Luke 12:54-56). In the Jewish way of thinking, if Pilate was still governing Judea, then the kingdom had not come. If the glorious temple of Ezekiel 40-48 had not been constructed, then the kingdom had not come. If the pagans were not defeated or flocking to Zion, then the kingdom had not come. They were looking for various signs. They were looking for upheavals and revolts. Jesus counters this thinking by teaching the Pharisees that the kingdom was not coming with signs that could be observed. They were always asking for signs from heaven (cf. Luke 11:16). There would not be signs like this upon which people could make calculations. In fact, the scriptures point to the suddenness of the kingdom's arrival. But that is not the point right here. Jesus wants the Pharisees to grasp that the kingdom is not coming in the way they think it would come.

Jesus teaches something very startling. Jesus says that you are not going to say that the kingdom is here or there because the kingdom of God is in their midst. The KJV, NKJV, and NIV 1984 reads “the kingdom of God is within you.” This is a plausible reading of the Greek, but is rightly rejected because Jesus is talking to the Pharisees. Jesus was not telling the Pharisees that the kingdom of God was within them. Jesus has been spending his time in these chapters revealing that the Pharisees are not in the kingdom. The Samaritans, the sinners, and tax collectors were entering, but the Pharisees and religious leaders were not. Rather, the kingdom of God was in their midst. I want us to think about the impact of what Jesus is saying. Who was in their midst? Jesus was in their midst, the King of Israel. Recall what Jesus said in Luke 11:20. If Jesus casts out demons by the power of God, then the kingdom of God had come upon them. Jesus had been casting out demons. What is Jesus' point? The kingdom was already working in their very midst. The reign of God had already broken into the world through Jesus' ministry.

To see the kingdom, look at Jesus and what he offers. As we have seen in these last five chapters in Luke, the kingdom of God is made up of people who have responded to Jesus and share in the benefits he has to offer. The kingdom of God was within their grasp if they would recognize that Jesus is the King of this kingdom. The kingdom was arriving and the king was in their very presence. There was no need to look around all over the place for the kingdom. The kingdom is seen in Jesus.

Revealing The Son of Man (17:22-30)

In verse 22 Jesus turns to his disciples and teaches them more about the kingdom, as these many chapters in this section of Luke's gospel has been about. The Son of Man is going to come in his glorious kingdom. But there is a touch of a shift in the reference point. Jesus says they will desire to see "one of the days of the Son of Man" (vs. 22). In verse 24 Jesus calls this, "the Son of Man be in his day." Verse 26 uses the same phrase again, "So will it be in the days of the Son of Man." Verse 30 perhaps gives the greatest clarity, "So will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed." So what is "the day when the Son of Man is revealed" and what does it have to do with the message of the kingdom? These are the questions we will need to answer as we explore the rest of this chapter.

Jesus describes this as a coming event that will not be hidden. It will be observed like lightning across the sky. The coming of the Son of Man will be obvious to all. Therefore, do not listen to people who claim that the Son of Man is here or there. Jesus says that is going to be a time coming when they will desire the days of the Son of Man, but must not be fooled by going out and looking for it. When the days of the Son of Man arrive, the coming will be quite visible.

But before this coming can happen, the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected. Before the days of the Son of Man can arrive, the Son of Man is going to experience suffering and rejection. Second, Jesus wants them to know that life will seem to be the same as any other day. Just like in the days of Noah, so it will be during the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, and marrying in the days of Noah when the judgment of the flood came. In the same way, during the days of Lot people were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building. But then judgment suddenly came against Sodom, raining fire and sulfur on the city. Now we know what Jesus means by "the days of the Son of Man." He is talking about a coming judgment. Jesus says the days of the Son of Man are going to be like the days of Noah and the days of Lot. Life continued as normal but then judgment suddenly struck. Notice the two parallels between the days of the Son of Man and the days of Noah and Lot. First, the judgment was sudden. Second, the judgment was complete. The flood was a comprehensive judgment of the earth for its sins. The fire and sulfur was a comprehensive judgment of Sodom for its sins.

Response (17:31-37)

So what judgment event is Jesus speaking about as he gives this warning about the coming of the days of the Son of Man? Let's read the rest of the chapter to see what we can learn from Jesus' instructions. When the days of the Son of Man come, notice the first thing the people were to do was to not return to their homes. They were not to return to the house to gather their possessions, no matter if they were in the field or on the rooftop. They were to flee and not turn back, just like Lot's wife.

Now many people try to take these instructions to refer to the final judgment when Jesus returns for the final time. But these directions do not fit this interpretation. If it is the end of the world, the final judgment, when Christ returns to the earth and we all stand before the white throne judgment of the Lord, then why would it matter that a person not turn back to his house? If it is the end of the world, then it is the end and it does not matter what a person does.

Second, Jesus says that when the days of the Son of Man come, where there are two people, one will be taken and one will be left. Notice in verse 34 two people may be sleeping in bed. But one person will be taken and one will be left. In verse 35 two people may be working in the field. But one person will be taken and one will be left. These descriptions also do not fit the end of the world judgment. If it is the end of the world, the final judgment of Christ, then no one is going to be left. Everyone will stand before the Lord in final judgment and give an account, as the scriptures teach.

The final description is given in verse 37. There will be dead bodies everywhere. Jesus says that there are going to be corpses and the vultures are going to circling and gathering for their meals because there will be so many dead bodies. This also does not fit the end of time, final judgment of God. There are not going to be dead bodies with vultures eating our flesh when Christ returns for the final time. When the end comes, it is the end and nothing else is going to happen (cf. 2 Peter 3:10-12; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26).

The Coming Kingdom of God

So what is Jesus talking about? Let bring all of the questions together so that we can comprehensively answer all the questions we have raised so far. What are "the days of the Son of Man?" What do these days have to do with the kingdom of God? What event fits these directions and descriptions to not return to the house when these days come, that one person will be taken and one will be left, and there will be dead bodies everywhere so that the vultures will come? Daniel 7 describes the coming of the Son of Man as the subjugation of all wicked, insubordinate nations and kingdoms.

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14 ESV) All people and nations must serve him. His kingdom has eternal power and rule. The expectation of the coming of the Son of Man and the arrival of the kingdom of God was the subjugation of the nations (cf. Psalm 2; Psalm 145). The kingdom of God will conquer worldly nations and kingdoms. Daniel 2 pictures the kingdom of God shattering and crushing the world nations. This is the beginning of warning judgments given by Jesus in his teachings. The Jewish nation was going to be judged because of its rebellion to God, disobeying God's commands, killing the prophets, and most notably killing Jesus, the King. This fits the directions and description given by Jesus. The Romans made their invasion of Judea and Jerusalem around 67 AD and completed its destruction in 70 AD. When the Romans came, the people were to quickly flee and not return to their home for their possessions. Further, many of the Jews were captured by the Romans in this invasion, explaining the description of one person being taken and one person being left. Finally, there were dead bodies everywhere, as recorded by the historian Josephus, who lived during that time. He records the horrors of the Roman invasion. It was an event that was visible to all people as Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. The Jewish nation was being swiftly and comprehensively judgment for its wickedness and the kingdom of God continued to conquer nations in rebellion to Christ. This is the picture of the days of the Son of Man and how it relates to the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

But what does this mean for us today? Why does the imagery of Jesus as a conquering king ruling in his kingdom and subjugating the nations have any impact or meaning for us? Daniel 7 gives us a picture of the expectations of the kingdom and what it means for us.

But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever (Daniel 7:18 ESV)

And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. (Daniel 7:27 ESV)

In the last few lessons we have discussed the greatness and glory of Jesus as King. Everyone must bow the knee before Jesus, giving our lives completely to him as his subjects or be judged with the rest of those who reject him. For this lesson, let's focus on the amazing graciousness of God. This kingdom is not about the wrath of God wiping out the enemies, though the scriptures are certainly clear that the enemies will be judged. The kings and rulers of the earth today rule in a selfish way. We see dictators historically and currently ruling for themselves, acquiring power for selfish, evil motives. Please notice the rule of Jesus. His rule, authority, and kingdom are being given to the people of the Most High. He gives this all-powerful, glorious kingdom to his people.

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. 11 The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; 13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself. (2 Timothy 2:10–13 ESV)

In our wretched condition of sinfulness and rebellion, God has made a gracious offer to reign with him. He is offering a place in the eternal kingdom of God. He is giving us the glorious kingdom. How could God be so kind to offer us a place in this kingdom? It shows another dimension of God's love for his creation. He wants us to be with him. He wants us to reign with him. He is giving us a kingdom if we will become his people today.

Tenacious Faith
Luke 18:1-8

It is not too often when the narrative tells you the meaning of the parable before the parable is told. But this is the case in Luke 18. Jesus tells a parable that his disciples will pray and not lose heart. Jesus is concerned that his disciples will give up. He is concerned that they will become discouraged. Jesus fears that his disciples will stop praying because they have lost heart. Now there is a particular context that Jesus is concerned about that will cause his disciples to stop praying and give up. So let's not overlook the parable but read the parable with a discerning eye, looking for what circumstance about which Jesus is concerned for his disciples.

The Parable (18:2-5)

Jesus tells a parable about a judge who fears no one. He is not going to be told what to do. He does not care about God nor does he care about the opinions of people. This judge has no regard to the cares of anyone. He will not be moved by what people have to say. Ideally, judges should defend the poor and widows (Exodus 22:22-24; Deuteronomy 24:17-18). The point is that this judge was not the kind of person to be moved out of compassion. There is no compassion in this parable. Neither God's laws nor public opinion nor pity will move this judge to action.

The second character in the parable is a widow. Please notice her complaint because it is important to the meaning of the parable. "Give me justice against my adversary." She keeps coming to this judge asking for justice against her adversary. We are not told what injustice she is experiencing. All that we know is that she has an adversary. The reason is not relevant to the story. What is relevant is that she is a helpless widow and she is experiencing repeated injustices. This helpless woman appeals over and over to the judge with the authority and power to give her justice.

Finally the judge acts in her favor after a long duration of time. He does not act because he himself is just or righteous. He does not act because of God's laws. He does not act out of pity for the widow. He acts because she is wearing him out. She is beating him down by his constant coming and requesting justice. Her tenacity has brought about the verdict she has been diligently seeking.

The Parable's Meaning (18:6-8)

Now we must be careful at this moment not to misunderstand the point of the parable. The point is not that God does not care about his people and so we need to pester him enough to get him to act on our behalf. Neither is the point that God does care about his people so we need to pester him enough so that he will act on our behalf. These statements are not at all the point of the parable nor reflect the loving character of God. The unrighteous judge does not represent God. God cares about his laws. God cares about his people. Here is the point: the widow did not give up in seeking justice even though she was dealing with an unrighteous, uncompassionate judge. Will Jesus' disciples continue to call out and seek justice from the righteous, good, holy, and compassionate God all the while experiencing injustices for a long duration of time? That is the question at hand upon which Jesus is concerned about his disciples having tenacious faith. Notice verse 7. God is not like this unrighteous judge. God will give justice to his chosen people. He will not delay long over them. But, will his disciples still have faith in God, after being mistreated and experiencing suffering and injustice, when God's justice comes?

This parable fits the context of chapter 17 and should not be separated from it. In chapter 17 Jesus gave an early warning for the coming destruction of Jerusalem. The disciples were going to experience great suffering and great injustice for the cause of Christ in the first century. Jesus is concerned that his disciples will not have the fortitude and steadfastness to trust him when those difficult times arrived.

First Century Context

Listen to some of the scriptures about what the Christians were enduring and what God was promising for them.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. 10 They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" 11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. (Revelation 6:9–11 ESV) These are chilling words about the suffering those disciples in the first century were experiencing. They are being killed for the word of God and their testimony for Jesus. They are crying out with the intensity of the widow in this parable. How long before you judge and avenge our blood. They are crying out for justice. Toward the end of the book of Revelation we read that justice arrive on behalf of God's chosen people.

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants." (Revelation 19:1–2 ESV)

But this is not a lost parable on us. Jesus was not simply concerned with the suffering and injustices that the Christians would feel in the first century. The call for perseverance was continued by the apostles throughout the scriptures. The preaching of the gospel included the call for Jesus' disciples to maintain tenacious faith in the face of repeated injustices. Listen to a few of those exhortations:

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— 6 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. 11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:5–12 ESV)

Paul says that God will repay those that afflict you. But it just won't be right now. While we live and serve the Lord there is going to afflictions and suffering from others. But he wanted them to be filled resolve for every good work so that Jesus may be glorified. Listen to how Peter gave the same admonition:

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2 that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, 3 knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. 4 They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." 5 For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, 6 and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with

water and perished. 7 But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:1–10 ESV)

Peter also says that they are dealing with the scoffers, but their judgment is coming. The apostle Paul gave the same encouragement to the Christians in Rome:

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:19–21 ESV)

Here is the point: Jesus wants us to know the certainty of God's justice and call us to resolute faithfulness in anticipation of that certainty. Jesus is giving assurance that those who pray to God for final vindication will be answered. But the question of verse 8 is important: Will we be faithful to God in the face of this world's injustice, eagerly awaiting God's vindication?

Tools For Faithfulness

As we conclude, I want to spend a moment talking about the ways that we can maintain our faithfulness through difficult times as we wait for the Lord to bring his justice to the earth and put all things to right.

(1) Prayer is the ballast in hard times. The first verse told us that we are to keep praying and keeping praying. Prayer is the tool for us in our difficult times. Do not stop praying just because you are enduring repeated suffering. Prayer is the life preserver to keep us afloat during times when we experience injustices. Our God is more willing to hear our prayer than we are often willing to pray it! God is not the unrighteous judge, as verse 7 points toward. God will give justice to his chosen. When Peter and John were arrested and released, what did they do along with the Christians? They prayed for boldness (Acts 4:29). When Peter was imprisoned, what is the house of Mary doing with many other Christians. They are gathered praying (Acts 12:12). When Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi, what are they doing? They are praying and singing hymns to God (Acts 16:25).

(2) Pray God's Word. I have personally found having an active, living prayer life to be difficult. I cannot put my finger on exactly the problem, but I think it has to do with not knowing exactly what to say or what to pray for. I believe some of my most intense times in prayer have been when I simply can say to God, "I don't know, but you do. Please do something." I have tried acronyms, which I am glad have been successful for so many. But I have found something that has ignited my prayer life that I want you to use to help you remain faithful and have strength through times of injustice and suffering. Pray God's word. In Acts 4 when Peter and John along with the Christians lift their voices in prayer, you will notice that they pray the scriptures (Acts 4:25-26). They read a section from Psalm 2 and then revolve their prayer around those words. I have found this to be so helpful. When you read the word of God, use what you have read as the catalyst for your prayer life. I pray what I read which particular application to my current condition and situation. For example, we studied John 3:17-21 in last week's lesson. Pray to God about understanding that we are the condemned. Pray in thanks to God for sending his Son so that we do not have to perish in our sins. Pray to help to expose our works. Pray my sins to God. Pray for strength to walk in the light. Pray that God's glory is seen in my works. Let's use Scott's lesson from

Sunday night which was from Philippians 1. Pray to God that my love will abound more and more. Pray for purity. Pray that my life will be filled with the fruit of righteousness. The word of God makes it easy for us to direct our minds and hearts toward what we need.

(3) Don't stop praying. Prayer is your life line to God. Prayer is your connection to God. Jesus feared that his disciples would stop praying because the world would be harsh on his followers. There are a number of reasons why we fail to pray. (1) We allow our physical weakness to interfere (we are tired or lazy). (2) We lack discipline to stay with prayer. (3) We have a false sense of independence. We think we have this life under control. (4) We lack faith. We do not believe that God will act on our behalf. (5) We are in complete rebellion. We do not pray because we do not care. We have no heart or love for God. (6) We have lost our hope in God. God has not answered our prayers the way we think he should have.

God is begging you to jump start your prayer life. God has guaranteed that he will make things right. Do not give up on God. Will Jesus find faith when he comes again? Will we show that we have put our full trust in him, as revealed by an active, living prayer life? Do not give up. Dig in to Jesus and let him carry you through. He will make all things right if we will have the faith to trust him.

Too good to be saved
Luke 18:9-14

The gospel of Luke is continuing to ask and answer the question: Who is in the kingdom of God? Or to put the question another way: Who can be justified before God? In this parable Jesus is going to show who is justified before God and how such a one is justified. This parable is going to show two people trying two different means to find justification.

Before the parable begins, Luke tells us that Jesus told this parable to people who trusted in themselves for righteousness and treated others with contempt. The problem is clearly stated. Jesus is dealing with people who are trusting in themselves for salvation and justification. In trusting in themselves, they are treating other people with contempt. A term that we frequently use is that these people were self-righteous. So the parable is going to describe them and their error so they will understand how one enters the kingdom of God.

Two Extremes

The parable begins with two men going up to the temple for prayer. There were two periods of public prayer each day (9am and 3pm). We don't think of prayer in these terms but this is what the Jewish people did in the first century, and we see this prayer activity throughout the book of Acts. The two people who go up in this prayer are the two extremes in Jewish society. First, the Pharisees is one of the extremely religious people in that day. We have seen them on many occasions in our study of Luke's gospel. They were the people who showed contempt and filled with disdain for others who were not like them. The other person is the tax collector. The tax collector was the villain of the day. Consider how the complaint against Jesus was that he ate with sinners and tax collectors. Tax collectors were considered the worst of people, usually being thieves, extortioners, and traitors to the Jewish nation. Tax collectors were hated sinners. The two people are a contrast of extremes. The Pharisee represents the moral, righteous person. The tax collector represents the vile, immoral person.

There are two ways to understand what the Pharisee does in the parable. He is either standing by himself as he begins his prayer or he is praying about himself, and the translations and scholars are divided about which way to understand what he does. I think the NET captures the idea well: **"The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself like this:"** As you read the prayer you will see that this is exactly what the Pharisee is doing. He is praying about himself. His prayer is not really toward God but in contempt toward others. The Pharisee shows his moral uprightness in the words of his prayer. The Pharisee exalts himself above others before God because of all his righteous acts. He is not an extortioner. He is not an adulterer. He is not even like this tax collector. He fasts twice a week and gives a tenth of all that he gets. This person is moral and he is extra religious. He fasts more than the law required and he is careful in giving a tenth of everything, as the law required.

The Pharisee

Why does he think that he is in the kingdom of God? How does he think justification occurs? He thinks he has justification because of all the things he is doing. He thinks he is a good, moral person. Look at all the good things he is doing. He is not like those awful people in the world. He is certainly not like this immoral, vile tax collector. This is what the religious and secular world thinks about justification today. People think that they just need to go to a church somewhere and they will be found justified in the sight of God. Some people think that they need to be charitable and give their money to others. Some think that they just need to be generally good, fairly moral, and not as bad as these other terrible

people who are thieves and murderers. Most believe justification is found in “making a difference” and “leaving the world better than you found it.”

But here is the shocker to the story. According to verse 14, this person is not justified. The moral, upright person with all of his religious acts is not justified. Why? How can this be? The problem is that he thinks he is righteous by what he does. The Pharisees had not listened to the prophets which declared this truth. David declared, **“For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.” (Psalm 51:16 ESV)**

The prophet Hosea declared, **“What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hosea 6:4–6 ESV)**

Isaiah spoke similarly: **“You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. (Isaiah 64:5–6 NIV2011)**

Our righteous acts do not bring about our justification. This is the problem with the Pharisees, as verse 9 notes. He trusted in himself for righteousness. He relied upon his own actions to save him. The problem is that there is not one person righteous (Romans 3:9; cf. Psalm 14:1). How easy it is for us to slip into the same kind of thinking! We read this story and thank God that we are not like the Pharisee! Our actions cannot justify us.

The Tax Collector

What made the tax collector different? Why would Jesus endorse this immoral tax collector as one who is justified and entering the kingdom of God rather than the Pharisee? First, the humility of the tax collector pours out with every description. Verse 13 reveals that the tax collector will not even approach the temple. As he comes up to the temple for prayer, he will not draw near but stands afar off. He recognizes his unworthiness to approach God. He does not lift up his eyes. The lifting of the eyes was a normal posture for Jewish prayer. Yet this is another sign of humility that he will not even look up toward heaven. Further, he beats his chest, which was a sign of extreme sorrow and contrition. The beating of the chest was not normal for Jewish prayer. God honors the humble. God exalts the humble (cf. James 4:8-10). God wants a humble and contrite heart (cf. Psalm 51:17). The tax collector is showing a humble heart.

Further, he has a humble heart that understand he needs atonement and mercy. His words are not about his actions. He does not give a list about the good things that he has certainly done in his life. He does not speak about how he is better than certain people. He does say that he has a better heart than that lousy Pharisee. What is there to say before the Lord regarding our justification? It is certainly not, “Look at all that I have done!” The tax collector understands that we do not want God to look at all we have done. When God looks at what we have done, we must quickly utter the words, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” We must quickly call out for atonement, for a covering over of our sins. To think that we can stand on our actions and stand on our righteousness is the pinnacle of arrogance and pride. Do we truly think that our actions can justify us before the Almighty God? The tax collector understood his need for mercy and repentance.

So how do good works fit into the picture? So often people will discard good works as if they are not relevant. Our good works do not justify us. Our good works do not enter us into the kingdom of God. Jesus already explained the value of our good works earlier in this gospel.

“So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’” (Luke 17:10 ESV) Our good works are not meritorious; they are what we were supposed to do as our duty in the first place. Is there anything praiseworthy for you stopping at a traffic light? No, because that is what you were supposed to do. No one at the police department is giving you a prize for that. Our good works do nothing to justify ourselves. Our good works are what were required of us to begin with. Those good works come because we see that God has been merciful to us as sinners. Let’s close with how we can the heart of the tax collector and not the heart of the Pharisee.

Applications

I am the Pharisee...

1. When I compare myself to others and congratulate myself for being more spiritual than they are.
2. When I am impressed by how much I am giving to God and doing for God.
3. When I think others’ sins are worse than mine.

I find justification...

1. When I see myself rightly — a sinner.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. 17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:15–17 ESV)

2. When I measure myself to the holiness of God, not others.
3. When I have a sense of the shame from my sin and recognize the alienation my sin has caused between me and God.
4. When I know that I am unworthy of the kingdom.
5. When I admit I am a sinner, confessing it to God and to others.

Sacrificing All For The Kingdom Luke 18:15-30

In our last lesson we examined Jesus' parable concerning a Pharisee and a tax collector. The surprise of the story was that the tax collector was justified and belonged to the kingdom of God while the Pharisee, the religious, moral person was not justified. The reason was the tax collector revealed humility and recognition of his sin and need for grace while the Pharisee proudly relied on his own righteousness, which led to his contempt of others. The author of this gospel is not done with this theme. In 18:15-30 Luke records two events to help us see who is justified and in the kingdom of God and who is not. We are going to notice three groups coming to Jesus, wanting something from him.

Children of God (18:15-17)

The first scene begins with parents bringing their infants to Jesus to be touched by him. We have to assume that the parents are looking for a blessing to be placed on them. But the disciples see this and begin to rebuke the parents. One can imagine the scene. The teacher is too busy to be bothered by parents bringing their infants! We have more important work to be doing! But rather than being too busy for the children Jesus tells his disciples to let the babies come to him. Jesus is going to use this as an opportunity to teach his disciples. Jesus says to such like these infants belongs the kingdom of God. Then listen to what Jesus says: "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." (Luke 18:17 ESV)

Now there have been many ideas advanced concerning what Jesus means by this. People speak of the innocence of a child or the humility of a child, but this does not seem to be the point in Luke's gospel. Notice that Luke records this event as infants being brought to Jesus, not children. There is really only one characteristic that an infant has that has any relevance to the context of the story. Infants are totally helpless and are completely dependent on others. All that an infant can do is cry out for help. An infant cannot do anything else. Consider how this fits with the previous parable. What was the problem with the Pharisee? His problem is that he does not see his need. He is relying on himself and his own righteousness rather than relying on the grace of God because he is a sinner. The heart of the disciple is one that is completely dependent on God for forgiveness and salvation. We are infants before God, utterly helpless and completely dependent upon the Lord for salvation. Consider what we are always called in scriptures. We are never called, "adults of God." We are always called "children of God." Children are dependent and our complete dependence is to be on God alone.

Inherit Eternal Life (18:18-23)

A ruler asks Jesus a very important question: "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus' response is fairly startling for a couple of reasons. Notice first that Jesus does not immediately answer the question, but asks why this ruler is calling him "good." Jesus makes the point that only God is good. Jesus maybe making the point that if you call me good then you need to accept me as God because only God is good. But consider the theme of Luke in this section. No one is good but God. You cannot depend on your own righteousness because you are not good. You have no righteous acts to depend upon. Jesus knows the heart and the attitude of this ruler and so Jesus tries to get him to think about his own life. No one is good. You cannot go around calling people good because in the absolute sense only God is good and everyone else is sinful.

But Jesus goes on to answer the question. "You know the commandments." You want to inherit eternal life, then you know what the commandments are. Jesus then lists a few of the commandments to summarize the Law of Moses. Listen to the ruler's response: "All these I have kept from my youth." The

problem immediately becomes evident. He is also relying on his own righteousness. What do I need to do to inherit eternal life because I have done all the commandments since my youth? When Jesus tells us to do the commandments, our response cannot be, "Yeah, I have that down. I have been doing them from my youth." The requirement of the law is to cause us to recognize our problem. No one was supposed to look at the law of God and think that they are doing all that God has required of them. The law shows us our sins, not our perfection.

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." (Galatians 3:11 ESV)

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20 ESV)

When confronted with the teaching that to inherit eternal life requires keeping the commands of God, the only response we can have is that of the tax collector, "Be merciful to me, a sinner!" To answer that we have been keeping the law since our youth is the epitome of arrogance and delusion. We have not kept the law. We must not think that this ruler is truthful in what he is saying. He is deluded by his self-righteousness. He should have known the scripture that taught:

The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. (Psalm 14:2-3 ESV)

This is the passage that Paul quotes in Romans 3:10 declaring none to be righteous so that we would understand that no one can be justified by the law. Listen to what Paul says about the law.

I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. (Romans 7:9-11 ESV)

This ruler does not get it. He does not see his need for a savior. He sees his own self-righteousness and his relying upon his own works. Our problem is that we define obedience and our righteousness by some of the laws of God, not all of God's laws. We do not include the laws where we fail. We pick out the laws of God that we are good at and think that we have some kind of righteousness to stand on. We haven't committed adultery, or haven't murdered, or haven't stolen, so we think we are good, righteous people. But we ignore commands like do not lust in your heart, malice, bitterness, outbursts of wrath, or loving our neighbor as ourselves. We saw this problem all the way back in chapter 10. A lawyer was trying to test Jesus and asked the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus' response was the same — what does the law say? The lawyer rightly quoted, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said, "Do this, and you will live." So then the lawyer has to justify himself. Jesus is trying to get us to see that we have not lived up to the laws of God.

We cannot pick out the laws that we are good at and think that we have fulfilled and obeyed the law of God. Jesus has to make us see our sin so that we will see our need for a Savior. We cannot see ourselves as obedient to God's law but violators of God's law. Seeing our sins and our lack of righteousness causes us to depend completely on God and to give him all that we have.

So Jesus tells the ruler that there is something that he lacks. He needs to sell all he has, give to the poor, and then you will have treasure in heaven. Then follow Jesus. But when the ruler heard this, he was very sad because he was extremely rich. Jesus hits a place in the law where the ruler was deficient. Jesus exposes the sin in his life. The ruler thinks he has kept the law from his youth. But the ruler had not. The ruler had violated the first commandment: **"You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).** Jesus identified this ruler's god and identified that he had not kept the law at all.

It amazes me how many writers seem to discount this command as not relevant for us. And we may read the words of Jesus and be glad that this was a command given to this ruler and not to us. But the same command is to us if we are so concerned about the idea of giving up our possessions and wealth to follow Jesus because our heart is not right. If we need to justify ourselves because we do not want to give up everything to follow Jesus then we also have another god and not the Lord as our God. Is there something Jesus could say for us to give up that we would not give up to follow Jesus? Is there something that Jesus could ask that would be too much for us to sacrifice? The ruler did not think it was worth the sacrifice. He does not love the Lord God with all his heart, soul, and strength because he was unwilling to give up anything and everything for the Lord.

We learn a very important principle for our lives. To receive eternal treasure we must give up what we treasure. Jesus does not accept our idolatrous hearts. We cannot come before him thinking we are righteous and good, all the while unwilling to give up whatever it is in our lives that is holding us back from true trust and full dependence on him. The infant has nothing and is fully dependent on the parents. This is the heart that God requires to inherit eternal life. We may think that we have kept the laws of God but what are withholding from God. What is in our heart that is too great to sacrifice for him? That object, that desire, and that pursuit is our idol.

The Worthy Sacrifice (18:24-30)

Now Jesus gives us the warning we need to hear. "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God." We really need to hear these words. Our wealth, which gives us our comforts, fulfills our desires, and provides our conveniences, interferes with entering the kingdom of God. In verse 25 Jesus illustrates the difficulty by describing it as a camel going through an eye of the needle. The camel was one of the largest animals in Palestine and the eye of the needle is the smallest of holes. It is difficult for the wealthy to enter the kingdom because our hearts become captured by this world. We have to see that our wealth is a barrier to our entrance into God's kingdom. Wealth will be the thing that keeps us from being justified on the day of judgment. Jesus warned of this in the parable of the soils. The seed is choked out by the hearts with thorny soul, which was a picture of the word of God being choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and the fruit does not mature (Luke 8:14). We do not grow and become the servants of God as our Lord desires because our hearts are captured by the cares and love of this world. How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom! Jesus is calling for our diligence. Jesus is calling for our careful watching. Jesus is calling for extra effort for us to be his disciple.

The disciples understand the weight of what Jesus is saying. Notice their response: "Then who can be saved?" If a wealthy ruler who has been good and morally cannot enter the kingdom of God, then who can? If someone who tries to keep the law and is blessed with riches cannot get in, who can? The wealthy were supposed by the people to have the blessings of God. Listen to Jesus' words: "What is impossible with men is possible with God." Without the grace of God salvation is impossible. We cannot save ourselves. No one who relies on their own righteousness can be saved. God is seeking people who recognize their sinfulness and helplessness, will give up everything to receive salvation from their sins and will go forward living for him.

Look at verse 28 and hear what Peter says. "See, we have left our homes and followed you." Peter understands what the ruler was lacking. Peter notes that they have been willing to make the sacrifice. We have left our homes to follow you. The leaving of the home does not mean that they simply left their house. The wording is that they left "their own." They have left their possessions, their families, their occupations, and more to follow Jesus. They have made the sacrifice the ruler was unwilling to make. Jesus' answer confirms this is the picture. There is no one who has left home, possessions, or family for the sake of the kingdom who will not be rewarded many times more now and in the life to come. There

are blessings now and blessings to come. The point is that we must know that God recognizes the sacrifices we make for him. Our sacrifice of this life will be rewarded with eternal life. God vindicates those who completely trust in him. We must leave it all behind. Sacrifice the normal, worldly life now to receive eternal life and salvation from our sins. But this will only happen when we see ourselves as sinners, not as righteous.

If there is something we would not give up to follow Jesus, then we are in the same position as this ruler who refused to give up his wealth. The things that we allow to interfere with our prayer life, worship time, Bible study time, and service to God are some indicators as to what we deem more important than the Lord. When we see our sinfulness, our lack of righteousness, and need for a savior, then we will express our helplessness to God, respond to him in faith, and forfeit all there is for the great treasure of following Jesus.

One of the great attributes of God is his mercy toward his creation. God creates people to be in his likeness only to watch each person ever made rebel against him. Jesus is going to tell us in this section how mercy is given to the people he made who have rebelled.

Jesus Has To Die (18:31-34)

For mercy to come to the world, Jesus has to die. This is the sixth announcement of Jesus' death. Jesus gives a detailed prediction of all that will happen when they go to Jerusalem. But notice that this is the prophetic plan of God. Everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. First, Jesus would be handed over to the Gentiles. The Jews will not kill Jesus themselves. They will turn Jesus over to the Gentiles as a criminal. Second, Jesus will be mocked. He will not receive any respect. He will not be honored as the king that he is. Rather, they will make fun of him for his claim of kingship. Third, Jesus will be shamefully treated. Not only will the mockery be of words, but also in action. They will put a scarlet robe on him, a crown of thorns, and reed in his hand, and bow down to him in mockery of his claim. Fourth, Jesus will be spit on. What vile and disgusting treatment to be spit on. Fifth, Jesus will be flogged. This was a custom that was often part of the crucifixion process. Based upon the prophecy in Isaiah 52:14 and the short time Jesus lasts on the cross, the evidence points to Jesus being severely flogged. Sixth, Jesus will be killed. Consider the weight of the words Jesus is saying. We are going to Jerusalem and I am going to be killed. Also notice that nothing that is about to happen is a surprise to Jesus. There is nothing that will transpire that is by accident. The prophets predicted these evident. None of these actions catch Jesus off guard. To make any suggestion that the death of Jesus was not part of the plan is completely false. Jesus' rejection and death was the plan of God. Jesus is predicting it and is going to Jerusalem anyway. This is the way that mercy is going to come to the world. This is way that Jesus will save people from their sins. Seventh, on the third day Jesus will rise. How amazing is this? Not only is Jesus predicting with death with amazing details, but now he is predicting his resurrection! They are going to kill him but in three days he will raise from the dead.

But none of these things were understood by his disciples. This did not fit the disciples' expectations or understanding of the Messiah. How is it possible for the Messiah, the Savior of the world, to die? It is difficult for us to appreciate how surprising this road Jesus is taking would be. The road for our mercy is the road of suffering and death for the Savior.

The Cry For Mercy (18:35-43)

As Jesus comes near Jericho on his way to Jerusalem, there was a blind man sitting by the roadside begging. It is important to keep in mind that there was not a social welfare system to deal with those with disabilities. The disabled relied upon their families and the good hearts of those who passed by. There was nothing else a disabled person could do. While sitting on the roadside, the blind man hears a crowd go by and asks what the great noise is all about. The crowd tells him that Jesus of Nazareth is walking by. The blind man cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who were in the front of the crowd rebuked this blind man, telling him to keep quiet. But the blind man shouts all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" So Jesus stops and has the blind man brought to him. Then Jesus asks what he wants him to do. The blind man responds, "Lord, let me recover my sight." Jesus tells him "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well." Immediately the man recovered his sight and followed Jesus, glorifying God. When all the people saw this, they also gave praise to God. Now,

let's consider what Luke is doing in this chapter. The rich ruler desired eternal life but did not receive it. But the blind beggar receives his sight. Why does the blind beggar find mercy?

(1) *Sin blinds us from seeing God.* The first point we must observe is that the blind man calls Jesus "the Son of David" twice when he learns that Jesus was walking by. What does this title mean? This a messianic confession of great significance. The Messiah is called "the Son of David" based on a prophecy made by the Lord through the prophet Nathan to King David.

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (2 Samuel 7:12-13 ESV) The blind man recognizes that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the king of Israel, and the healer of the people (cf. Luke 4:18-19). The ruler saw Jesus as a good teacher. The blind man sees Jesus as the Messianic King.

The world is not stupid. The world is blind. They cannot see what we are talking about. They do not understand Jesus nor understand what we are doing because they are blind and they always have been blind. Things that seem obvious cannot be seen by them. This is why we get frustrated when people do not see that Jesus is God. The world does not understand who Jesus is. He is treated like the Pharisee and the ruler treated him. He considered a good teacher. He is considered to be just another man trying to do a good thing for the world with his teachings. Sin blinds us from seeing God. Listen to what the apostle Paul said:

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4 ESV)

If you have not obeyed Jesus and become his disciple, the struggles you are dealing with in your conscience is because you have been blinded by Satan and his work on your heart. He is trying to keep you from seeing the greatness of Jesus. He is trying to make you question what we are doing here right now. He is trying to distract you from listening to God's word. He is trying to harden your heart so that you will not listen. He wants you to ignore the stirring in your heart that God is creating through his word. He wants you to go back to your schedule, mindless doing the mundane things of life, ignoring the reality of eternity. Sin blinds us from seeing who Jesus is and what he has done for each of us. Jesus is God who came to the earth in the fulfillment of God's plan to suffer mockery and shameful treatment. He came to be spit on, flogged, and killed all so that atonement could be made so God could show mercy to the world. The resurrection proves Jesus is God. But mercy to enter the kingdom is not universal, as we have seen throughout these stories in this chapter. Mercy is given to those who are able to see God.

(2) *Sin blinds us from seeing who we really are.* The second thing we notice about the blind man is his persistent cry for mercy. He is rebuked by the crowd. They tell him to keep quiet. Don't bother the teacher. But the man cried out all the more for Jesus. Notice that he is not crying out for money or crying out for food. Listen to the words of the blind man: "Have mercy on me!" What did we hear in the prayer of the tax collector earlier in this chapter? "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13). The tax collector went home justified while the Pharisee did not. When Jesus told the rich ruler to keep the commandments for eternal life, he told Jesus that he had done such. He was blind to the fact that he needed mercy. The blind man in this story is not blind spiritually at all. He understands his need. He does not need food. He does not need money. He needs mercy from the Son of David! He cries out repeatedly, "Have mercy on me!" This blind man will not be denied. He strongly desired mercy unlike the rich ruler. The blind are the ones who do not think they are blind but can see clearly. This is the Pharisee and the rich ruler. They do not see that they are blind. They think they are doing just fine and

do not recognize that Jesus is the only cure for their blindness. They do not see their sinfulness and therefore do not come to the Savior for forgiveness. Mercy is given to those who see their need for forgiveness. Mercy does not come to those who stand on their own merits and righteousness, believing their goodness makes them okay before God.

Conclusion

Finding mercy in the kingdom of God comes about in the same way. We need to call out to God to be merciful to us. In Acts 2:21 Peter quotes the prophecy of Joel that with the coming of the Christ, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It is an amazing prophecy of mercy. Peter tells us how to make that call on the Lord for mercy. The people ask Peter, "What must we do to be saved?" (Acts 2:37)? Peter responds, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). The apostle Paul was told the same thing at his conversion. Ananias told Paul, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). Peter taught that baptism is the appeal to God for a clean conscience (1 Peter 3:21). These are the steps God has commanded to receive mercy through the death of Jesus. Do you see that you need a Savior? Do you see that God has sent Jesus to die for your sins and salvation is only found in him? Come to Jesus today and find mercy.

Repentance In The Kingdom Luke 19:1-10

We have been studying the nature of the kingdom of God in this section of Luke. Luke has been answering two questions in these last few chapters, "Who is in the kingdom of God?" "Who is going to inherit eternal life?" Luke has put four stories together to drive into our hearts how the people you would not expect are in the kingdom while those who would expect to be in the kingdom will not enter. Jesus told a parable about a tax collector and a Pharisee. The Pharisee relied on his own morality and good works, while the tax collector relied on the mercy of God. The tax collector was justified not the Pharisee. The rich ruler is the proof of this parable. He thinks he has kept all of the Mosaic Law, but Jesus exposes that the rich ruler had broken the first commandment. He had an idol in his heart which was his wealth. He was unwilling to give up his wealth to follow Jesus. By contrast, a blind beggar saw his need for Jesus, crying out, "Son of David, be merciful to me." The blind beggar, though physically blind, was able to see his spiritual condition and knew he needed the mercy Jesus could offer. This brings us to the final surprising story to teach us who is in the kingdom of God.

Zacchaeus, The Tax Collector

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and is passing through the city of Jericho as he goes. A crowd is following Jesus on this journey. There was a man named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and he is rich. As we have noted throughout our study of the gospels, the tax collectors were hated by the Jews, not only because they were considered traitors to the Jewish nation, but because they were greedy and charged far more than the Roman Empire demanded. Luke wants us to think this way about Zacchaeus. He is a chief tax collector and he is rich, no doubt because of his business practices. But he is seeking to see Jesus. But the crowd was so great and he was a shorter person, he could not see or approach Jesus. So he climbs a tree to be able to see Jesus pass by.

As Jesus came to where Zacchaeus was, Jesus looked up into the tree and says something amazing. "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." I want you to hear the outrage of the crowd. They began grumbling when they heard these words. How can Jesus go and stay at this guy's house. He is a tax collector. He is a cheat. Listen to their words, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." How can Jesus stay with this person? Among the Jews it was unheard of for a rabbi or any other religious leader to lower himself by staying at the house of a tax collector. Please notice Jesus' words, "I **must** stay at your house." Just as Jesus had a divine appointment with the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4), Jesus has a divine appointment with this rich, chief tax collector.

Receiving Salvation

There are three things that Luke wants us to see in the response of this chief tax collector that reveals that salvation belongs to this man. First, he received Jesus joyfully. When Jesus tells Zacchaeus that he is going to stay in his house today, Zacchaeus hurries down from the tree and receives Jesus joyfully. This is an exciting thing. There is excitement in getting to know Jesus and spend time with him. "You will come into my house and spend time with me? How exciting!" So Zacchaeus hurries and receives Jesus joyfully. Luke draws the first contrast in this story between the rich ruler and this tax collector, Zacchaeus. The rich ruler was simply concerned with the minimum. What rule do I need to keep? What are my requirements? But look at Zacchaeus. He wants to know Jesus and spend time with him. It is not a question of what do I have to do, but a question of how can I see Jesus, meet Jesus, know Jesus, and spend time with Jesus. The attitude that is seeking Jesus is the attitude that finds salvation.

Second, notice his new heart that leads to generosity. When the people are complaining about Jesus going to this vile tax collector's home, Zacchaeus wants to reveal to the people his dramatic change of heart. Zacchaeus does not try to defend himself by relying on his works. This would violate what we have seen in these last two chapters. The crowd was not wrong about this chief tax collector. He is not defending himself as righteous in the face of the crowd's claims. Rather, Zacchaeus is resolving on the spot to act differently because Jesus accepts him. Zacchaeus is willing to change everything in his life. He is going to give half of his goods to the poor. Luke draws our second contrast to the rich ruler in Luke 18. The rich ruler was unwilling to give up his goods to follow Jesus because he was very rich. In fact, Jesus declares how difficult it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. The rich ruler could not see the great treasure of Jesus. He would not give up everything to follow him. Zacchaeus is also very rich, according to our story. But rather than respond like the rich ruler, Zacchaeus addresses the charges against him with radical life transformation. He will give half of his possessions because he wants to follow Jesus. He wants Jesus to stay with him and he will do anything to have that relationship with him.

Third, note Zacchaeus' repentance. "If I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." Under the Law of Moses the restitution law was to return what was defrauded plus 20% (cf. Leviticus 5:16). Zacchaeus has experienced such a transformation that he will give 400%. He does not want anything to interfere with his opportunity to be with Jesus. This is the heart of repentance that Jesus is looking for to grant salvation. Repentance desires to right previous wrongs whenever possible. I have encountered people who think they have offered repentance because they said they were sorry. Expecting someone to simply "get over it" is not repentance. Saying sorry is not repentance. We see an excellent example of repentance in Zacchaeus. He wants to right the wrong in a generous way. The man who was rich from swindling and extorting others has had a dramatic life change. Now he will give his possessions to the poor and he will restore anyone that he has defrauded. He does not have to be told to do this. He does not ask Jesus if he has to give up his possessions. He does not ask if he needs to right his previous wrongs. His heart is so changed by the invitation of Jesus that he is moved by his heart to act. It is not about finding the minimum requirements. It is a desire to correct our mistakes and right our sins when possible all for the opportunity to spend time knowing Jesus.

The question was asked by the disciples, "Who can be saved?" (Luke 18:26). If the rich ruler cannot be saved, who can be? The first answer was the blind beggar who saw his condition and recognized his need for mercy from Jesus. The second answer is the rich tax collector. Zacchaeus reveals the model response to Jesus' initiative. He will give up and do anything to spend time with the Savior.

Listen to how Jesus ends this scene. **"Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:9-10).** This vile, hated chief tax collector is receiving salvation today. He is a son of Abraham. This is an important declaration concerning Zacchaeus because Luke is taking us back to the beginning of his gospel. In Luke 3 we read about John the Baptizer who is preaching to the people to repent. Listen to his words: **"Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham'" (Luke 3:8).** A person is a child of Abraham when they bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The heart of repentance defines who are God's chosen and promised people and who are not. When our heart is changed by the Lord, it shows.

Conclusion

This wraps up Luke's section on answer who is in the kingdom of God. Luke ends by showing us who is receiving salvation from the Lord. (1) Those who receive Jesus gladly. This should be obvious, and yet it needs to be said. If you do not want a relationship with Jesus and want to get to know Jesus, then you

will not be part of his kingdom and receive salvation. You must want to see Jesus. You must want to spend time with Jesus. You must want to have your life hidden in him. (2) Those who will give up everything to be with Jesus. A relationship with Jesus is a call to sacrifice our desires and pursuits. Those who are receiving salvation are those who joyfully receive Jesus and then give all they have to remain with him. Luke has taught us to count the cost of discipleship, to give up our pride, to give up our wealth, to not think we can serve two masters, to come to him with thanksgiving and joy, crying out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." (3) Those who desire and actively seek to right previous wrongs. When our heart is changed by the Lord, it shows. We will try to restore relationship and make restitution for our sins. We will have a radical change of life, molding ourselves to the image of Christ because of the offer of forgiveness he has extended to us.

Accountability To The King Luke 19:11-27

In 4 BC when Herod the Great died, his territorial rule was divided between his three sons. Archelaus, one of Herod's sons, was assumed to rule over Judea. Though Archelaus began to rule immediately upon his father's death, his royal title could only be ratified by Augustus Caesar. So Archelaus made the long journey to Rome where he expected to be crowned as king. However, there was an active opposition to his rule by his subjects in Judea. A delegation of fifty Jewish leaders came from Jerusalem to Rome seeking an audience with Caesar claiming that Archelaus was unfit to govern because of his cruelty. The thousands of Jews who were living in Rome participated in the demonstration against the rule Archelaus. Caesar eventually allowed Archelaus the opportunity to prove himself worthy to rule Judea. When Archelaus returned to Judea he executed swift punishment against the men who rebelled against his rule.

What Jesus does in this section of Luke's gospel is tell a parable grounded in the near history of the nation. We are told in verse 11 that the reason the parable was told by Jesus was because he was near Jerusalem and people thought the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. The reason this topic is important is because it is the last week of Jesus' life. This is Jesus' last time to come to Jerusalem. Verse 1 tells us that Jesus is in Jericho as he tells this parable, a town on the way to Jerusalem where we saw the salvation of the Lord come to Zacchaeus.

The Parable

Jesus begins with a parable about a nobleman who went into a far country to receive a kingdom and then return. I would like to highlight something before we continue on in the parable and that is the timing of the kingdom. The nobleman is going to go away to a far away place, receive the kingdom, and then return. This is the first time we have seen in Luke the teaching that Jesus was going to leave but then return. Please notice that Jesus does not say that he is going to a far away country, returning, and then receiving the kingdom. He does not receive the kingdom upon his return, but receives the kingdom first and then returns. This is what the scriptures prophesied.

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14 ESV)

Jesus is about to leave the earth and return to the Father where he will receive the kingdom. Then there will be a time when he will return. So this is the set up to the story. Before he leaves for the far country, he calls ten of his servants and gives them ten minas. Each servant is given one mina. One mina was approximately four months of wages, so this is not a small amount of money. One mina is about one-third of your annual salary. The charge given to the servants is to make money, to put the money to work so as to make a profit. This is the idea of their charging being to "engage in business." Verse 14 is the point of parallel to the historical event of Archelaus. The citizens hate this nobleman and do not want him to rule over them. So let's set the parable for a moment. The nobleman is about to go to a far away country to receive a kingdom and return. Before he leaves, he gives his servants a mina to make money while he is away. Further, the citizens of the kingdom hate the nobleman and demand that he does not become their ruler.

When the nobleman returns, after successfully receiving the kingdom, he ordered his servants to come to him so that he would know what they had profited by doing business with the nobleman's

money. The first servant appears and tells him that he used the mina in business and made ten minas more. In verse 17 the nobleman praises his servant. Because the servant has been faithful in little, he is given authority over ten cities. The second servant has taken the nobleman's one mina and turned it into five minas. Notice that the second receives commending and is given authority over five cities.

The focus of the parable rests on the third servant in the story. Notice that the servant returns the mina to him. He admits that he did not do business with the mina, which is what the nobleman commanded him to do. He rejected the command and hid the mina in a handkerchief. Now listen to what the servant says of the nobleman. "I was afraid of you because you are a severe man." I was so afraid of your severity that I did absolutely nothing. This response does not make any sense which is why the parable continues. The nobleman says that he will condemn the servant with his own words. If you thought that I was a severe man, why didn't you turn a profit like I ordered you to do? The mina is taken away from him and given to the one who made ten minas. The ending is simple and clear. In business, money should be invested with someone who has proven that he knows how to make money grow. This servant has proven unable to carry out the task given to him. Therefore what was given has been taken away. He has been shown unworthy to belong to this kingdom and to be one of his servants. But the story does not end there. Remember the citizens that he read about in verse 14 who did not want the nobleman to rule over them and sent a delegation to try to stop his enthronement. They failed. Picture how this envisions Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. We will see the triumphal entry and the proclamation of the arrival of the king. Jerusalem does not want him to be king and so they kill him. But they will fail to stop his enthronement. The nobleman received his kingdom and returns. Verse 27 declares that these who did not want him to reign over them will be slaughtered, just like what happened historically to those who tried to stop Archelaus from becoming king.

Messages From The Parable

There are two sins that are noted in this parable, which really will be seen in the end to be one sin. What is the sin of the servant in verses 20-23? His sin is doing nothing. He took the mina given to him and did nothing. Now listen to the parable because this person is a servant. This is not talking about the unbelievers in the world. Do not apply this to them. Apply this to yourself. This parable is to be applied to people who believe they are the Lord's servants. The condemnation is that you took the mina and did nothing. We have seen on a number of occasions throughout the study of Luke's gospel that we will be held in account for what we did with our wealth and how we used our wealth for the kingdom of God. God has given us our wealth and we will be judged by what we did with it. But I would like to explore another area where God has given to us richly for which we will be called into account.

What have you done with the gospel? The gospel is the greatest gift that we have received. Our salvation is a gift from the Lord. So what are we doing with that gift? We have received the gospel and Jesus wants us to put that gospel to work in the world. The most important job we have been given is to be sowing the seed of the word of God. We cannot do nothing with the gospel. We cannot remain unconnected to the body of Christ. We cannot refuse to grow in the word of God, developing to a maturity of the faith and knowledge of our Lord. We cannot refuse to serve each other. We cannot refuse to teach. We cannot refuse to lead. Do you see the selfishness of this servant? I know what you gave me and I decided to do absolutely nothing with it. I was afraid of you. I was afraid of failure. So I did nothing.

I believe that the parable identifies one reason why we refuse to do something with the great gospel gift we have been given. Listen to the perception the servant has of the Lord. The servant describes his as a severe man. He is considered an unreasonably demanding master. He is pictured in his mind as a harsh, unjust taskmaster. You are too hard to obey! You are too demanding of me! You are requiring too much. Do you hear what the servant is doing? He is blaming God. He is saying that because his master is

so demanding, he was afraid and did nothing. God is not demanding. If you think he is demanding, then you do not know our Lord at all and I would like to study the scriptures with you to show you the true character of God. But let's suppose you are right and he is asking too much of us. How does disobedience make your point? If he is demanding so much of us, then how does our laziness and stubborn refusal fix the situation? If you are right, then you better obey because he is going to judge because he is the ruler and we are servants. We do not get to tell him how to rule and the kingdom is not entered on our terms. God has given you the mina of the gospel of grace. What are you doing with it? Are we hiding it? Are we sitting on it? Or are we putting it to work? Doing nothing is sin.

But there is another group of people in the story and another sin is identified. These are the citizens who hate the Lord and do not want him to rule over them. Their judgment is certain as it is described in verse 27. What is the difference between the citizens and the servant who did nothing with the mina? Nothing because they are both in rebellion to the king. One openly states that they do not want the king to rule and the other does not speak their rebellion, but their lives reflect the rebellion. Both are rejecting his authority. If you are in the group like these citizens. You are refusing the rule and reign of Jesus as king. He is going to come back in judgment. The scriptures clearly show that Jesus ascended to the Father in heaven and took his rightful place on the throne and has begun to rule. Now we are awaiting his return. When he returns, those who are his enemies will be judged to condemnation. This is why the gospel message call is to submit to the king before he returns. So often people seem to have a hard time with eternal punishment. But notice it is the choice of each person. These people do not want Jesus to rule over you. So Jesus will leave you in the kingdom of darkness, sin, and Satan rather than bringing you to the kingdom of life, as you requested. You are choosing what will happen when the king returns.

The Coming King Luke 19:28-48

We have a saying which has been a saying for a long time in human history. Seize the day! Carpe diem! Take advantage of the opportunities given to you. Make the most of what you have. These are common proverbs and ideals in our time, statements that the Lord himself emphasized to his people while he was on the earth. Luke 19:28-48 pictures of the arrival of Jesus into Jerusalem. Luke is going to teach us the need to take advantage of our opportunities before it is too late.

Jesus Approaches Jerusalem

Jesus is continuing to move toward the city of Jerusalem. Verse 29 tells us that he has come to the Mount of Olives, so he is standing across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem. But before entering Jerusalem, Jesus is about to fulfill prophecy. He tells two of his disciples to go into the nearby town where they will find a colt that no one has ever rode. Untie it and bring it to him. Further, if anyone asks why they are untying the colt, they are to answer that the Lord has need of it. So the two disciples enter the town and "found it just as he had told them." The owner then asks why they are untying the colt, and they answer that the Lord has need of it. Luke is making an emphatic point to his readers: Jesus is in control of the Jerusalem events. Everything is going according to the plan of God. This colt is prepared for the Lord's use. Jesus has everything prepared. When they ask what you are doing, you tell them that the Lord needs it. Every detail just as Jesus had told them.

The gospel accounts of Matthew and John point out to us that these events are to show the fulfillment in Zechariah 9. However, Luke does not make this connection. Luke is not interested in us turning to Zechariah and seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Luke does not draw attention to the prophecy so we will not either expect to notice that Luke didn't quote the scripture. So what does Luke want us to see? What are we supposed to learn about the arrival of Jesus to Jerusalem? Let's continue reading.

Jesus Proclaimed As King

The disciples bring the colt to Jesus. They throw their cloaks on the colt and Jesus begins to ride the colt toward the city of Jerusalem. Verse 37 tells us that Jesus is riding the colt down the Mount of Olives into the Kidron Valley to the city of Jerusalem. Luke gives us an interesting and useful detail about this parade for Jesus. We have already noted that Jesus is not Jerusalem and it is not the inhabitants of Jerusalem who are participating in this parade. Further, verse 37 tells us who is in the multitude following Jesus into Jerusalem. The whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen. It is a whole multitude of his disciples, not the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who are rejoicing and praising God at the arrival of Jesus. This may help us consider that we do not have a fickle crowd that will turn on Jesus later in the week and shout, "Crucify him." Rather, Jerusalem represents the citizens that we saw in the parable back in verse 14 who do not want Jesus to be their king. They will be the ones who will shout that we have no king but Caesar. But that is not these people who are participating in the triumphal entry. These are Jesus' disciples. This is a whole multitude of Jesus' disciples who have been following him through Judea. Remember what we saw back in Luke 19:3 that the crowd that was following Jesus was so great as Jesus came into Jericho that there was a man of short stature who climbed a tree to have a better view of Jesus.

Listen to what this crowd is proclaiming with a loud voice: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" This is a quotation from Psalm 118:26. Notice what the psalmist said: **"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you**

from the house of the LORD.” (Psalm 118:26 ESV) Notice that Luke emphasizes something for his readers. None of the other gospel writers quote the crowd this way. But Luke says, “Blessed is the King!” Your king has arrived. In Luke 13:35 we saw Jesus say to Jerusalem that they will not see him until they say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Interesting to notice that these words are being said, but it is not Jerusalem that is saying those words, according to Luke. Jesus had afforded the people an opportunity to repent and greet with a blessing the one who comes in the name of the Lord. This is an unfortunate conclusion that Luke is drawing for us, which will be explored more fully in verse 42. But Jesus has returned with the accolades and praise that he is the king. Jesus has come and is entering the city as the proclaimed king, fulfilling the hopes of the nation. In one week he will be taken outside of the city and killed as a messianic impostor. The proclamation of this crowd of disciples is accurate. “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” God’s work of reconciliation is happening through the life and kingship of Jesus. God is reconciling himself to humanity as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem to declare his rule. This king has come not only to rule but to save.

In the midst of this glory and honor from the multitude of disciples, some Pharisees who are following Jesus in the crowd approach Jesus and says, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” Again, this tells us that it is Jesus’ disciples that are following and praising Jesus as the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Listen to what Jesus says to their request. “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out!” What a tremendous statement! Jesus’ arrival is so momentous and important that it requires a response. This moment must be recognized. The king has come! The creation is aware of who Jesus is, but the leadership of the nation of Israel, those who were to teach and lead God’s people, did not know who Jesus was. The people Jesus came to save do not even know that the King has arrived. The primary point is that silencing the disciples or even silencing Jesus by killing him will not negate the fact that Jesus is the King.

Jesus and The Temple

Verses 41-48 contain the thrust of what all of this means. Jesus begins to weep for the city of Jerusalem. Notice the reason why. Today was the day that peace could have been made. John had preached the message to repent and prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. The people were not prepared for the arrival of Jesus to Jerusalem and had not repented. Rather than yielding to Jesus as the king, they are rebuking Jesus for allowing his disciples to call him the king. This reveals the high cost of sin. Sin causes us remain blind from the means of peace with God. Sin blinds us so that we fail to respond at the moment of salvation, thus allowing darkness to remain in our lives. Verse 44 presses the thought further. They missed the opportunity for salvation. They did not recognize the time of visitation from the Messiah. Jesus has come for salvation to the people but their rejection is going to lead to their judgment instead.

Here is where I want to bring their story to us directly. Why did they miss this? Why have they missed the moment of salvation so that now judgment will fall on them? If we can see the failure of these people and learn from them, then we will not miss our moment of salvation like they did. So let’s look at what Luke puts together for us so that we learn from their error.

The first act of Jesus in entering Jerusalem is to enter the temple and drive out the sellers. Here’s the reason why. They have taken the “house of prayer” and turned it into a “den of robbers.” They had turned the place that was supposed to be spiritual, full of prayer, and holy and turned it into something physical and greedy. Rather than the focus being on God, the focus was on themselves. It was on turning a profit. Their focus was on making money. Their focus was not on helping the people worship God or to teach spiritual things to the people. Their focus was earthly. Their concern was not for the things of God. In fact, look at what Jesus does while he is in the temple once he drives out the sellers. Notice verse 47:

“He was teaching daily in the temple.” He cleanses the temple and does what should have been done in the temple: teaching the things of God every day.

But there is something much greater going on here. The phrase, “den of robbers” is not an innocent phrase. It is a prophetically loaded term. It is a phrase that is used one other place in the scriptures. The prophet Jeremiah was speaking to the people and notice what he told them.

Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 7:9–11 ESV)

Listen to what Jeremiah condemns the people for doing. They are living how they want to live, full of sin, following their idols and gods, only to stand before God in worship at the temple and say, “We are delivered,” or, “We are saved!” They go to the temple to worship, claimed to be saved, only to continue in those abominations. Notice what God says about what they are doing. This kind of activity has turned the house of the Lord, where God’s name was, into a den of robbers and God himself has seen it. What does this mean? A den of robbers was a place where robbers hid. It was a cave where they would hide until they would strike another home and rob it of its goods. Then they would run and hide in the den/ cave until their next attack. They saw the den as their place of safety while they committed their evil acts. Do you see the idea? Because the people in Jeremiah’s day are coming to the temple to worship, they think they are saved even though they are committing all kinds of sins. Jesus imports that imagery into his day and tells them that nothing has changed.

In our last lesson we noted how the gospel cannot terminate on ourselves. We have been given a great gift and we must use that gift of the gospel. We noted doing nothing with the gospel is considered rebellion to our Lord. Notice what we learn here. Just because we perform some kind of religious act or profess some sort of piety does not mean that we are not operating like a den of robbers. We can treat attending services as this refuge that justifies us to commit sin and maintain our idolatrous behavior. We can treat baptism like some kind of talisman that means we are saved even though we refuse to put away our sinful ways. There are all kinds of spiritual activities we can perform that turn this into a den of robbers. We pray and then go right back into the same sinful behaviors. The people have missed the moment of salvation because their sinful ways had blinded them from seeing the darkness of their hearts so as to reject the arrival of the king who came to save them.

Verses 47-48 show the difference in the hearts. One group sees Jesus in the temple and they do not want to listen to anything he has to say. They just want him to be quiet and they are willing to destroy him to silence him. The other group of people is “hanging on his words.” The people are not just listening but they are listening with great anticipation and desire. They want to know everything that Jesus has to say. So Jesus comes, drives out the sellers, and begins teaching everyday. Jesus is forcing the people to recognize that they cannot keep living sinful, selfish lives and come to the temple and think they are fine. It is not going to happen. This truth is the same for us.

Will we miss this moment for salvation right now because we think we are fine because of some sort of religious or spiritual activity we engage in but all the while continue in our sinful living? Jesus is the king and he knows your heart. We can fool everyone in this room to believe that we are strong faithful Christians. But God knows and he sees, just as he told the people in Jeremiah’s day. God says that he sees what we are doing. God knows and you know if you are coming to hear the teachings of the Lord and worshiping him or if you are coming and your activity is like a den of thieves. Coming here or doing something spiritual makes you feel safe when in reality you are doomed and you refuse to see it. Jesus is weeping for you to know on this day the things that make for peace. Listen to his words and turn to him

before it is too late. There is a time when it is too late. Jesus declares that the time Jerusalem had come. Our time will come to stand in judgment. Turn your heart to the Lord Jesus and yield to the king.

Challenging Jesus' Authority (1-8)

Jesus has entered Jerusalem. The twentieth chapter of Luke reveals the Jewish leaders and authorities challenging the authority of Jesus. The reason why is because of what Jesus just did in Luke 19. Jesus has approached Jerusalem with a large crowd of his disciples proclaiming him as the king who comes in the name of the Lord. The king and savior of the world has arrived. When Jesus enters Jerusalem, the first place that he goes is into the temple. Jesus goes into the temple and condemns them for turning the house of prayer into a den of thieves. They were maintaining their sinful ways, not finding true repentance and life change, because they thought they were saved because they came to the temple to worship. But God saw their hearts and saw what they were doing and condemned them for it. Did you notice how Luke records the cleansing of the temple because it is important to the story of chapter 20? Notice that Luke does not record the turning over of the moneychangers' tables. Luke does not record making a whip and driving out the sellers. Luke does not record any of these events. Look at how Luke records the cleansing of the temple: by his teachings. Every day Jesus is in the temple teaching. Jesus came to cleanse by his teachings. According to Luke, this is the crux of the antagonism and why the leaders are seeking to destroy him (19:47). His teachings are cleansing the temple. So the leaders are going to challenge Jesus' teachings and challenge Jesus' authority because he has decried their activities as turning God's house into a hypocritical mockery.

The first challenge is in verse 2. The leaders want to know by what authority Jesus does these things or who gave him this authority. Jesus answers their question with a question of his own. This is a common way for the rabbis in that day to teach each other. If they will answer his question, then he will clearly answer their question. However, you will notice by his question to them that this is an answer to their question. Here is the question: was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Either John came as a messenger of God or he did not. One must either respond to John because he was sent by God or else he must be ignored because he was not sent from God. The answer to this question is important because John pointed to Jesus as the Christ. Jesus takes their question and does not dodge the question, but raises the stakes. The leaders understand that this is what Jesus has done. In verses 5-6 we see them discussing amongst themselves what answer they should give. Notice they fear the people will stone them, and rightly so. The Law of Moses taught that anyone who turned the people away from the Lord was to be stoned (Deuteronomy 13:10). So the leaders dishonestly say that they do not know. That is something children do. Why didn't you do what you were supposed to do? I don't know. Why did you color on the wall? I don't know. Jesus puts the leaders in the corner with his question and their best response is, "I don't know." They are missing their opportunity for salvation because they refuse to approach Jesus with a sincere and honest heart. This gives Jesus an opportunity to tell a parable.

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (9-18)

Jesus is not going to merely tell a parable. But notice as you read the parable that Jesus is explaining his authority. The parable will assert his authority and also reveals the hearts of these Jewish leaders. A man planted a vineyard, leased it out to tenant farmers, and went into another country for a long while. Now, before we move forward, we should recognize the vineyard imagery. The people in Jesus' day would have recognized the vineyard image as a representation for the nation of Israel. Many of the prophets depicted Israel as a vineyard that God had planted (Isaiah 5 is perhaps the most notable; see also Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 19:10; Psalm 80). So the time has come for the owner of the vineyard to receive some fruit from the vineyard. So the owner sends a servant to the tenant farmers for some fruit.

Rather than give fruit, the tenants beat the servant and send him away empty-handed. So the owner sends another servant. But they also beat him and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. So he sent yet another servant and they wounded him and cast him out.

Before we move forward it is important to grasp what Jesus is picturing. Jesus is describing the Father sending his prophets to the nation, calling for fruit and looking for fruit, only to be mistreated by the nation. Listen to the scriptures describing this very scene.

“For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. 4 You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the LORD persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets, 5 saying, ‘Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers from of old and forever. (Jeremiah 25:3–5 ESV)

All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the LORD that he had made holy in Jerusalem. 15 The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. 16 But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy. (2 Chronicles 36:14–16 ESV)

“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? (Acts 7:51–52 ESV)

Please consider the graciousness of God. How many servants should the owner send before he deals with these wicked tenants? If we were the owner, the first act of these egregious injustice would have been dealt with swiftly and justly. Who would keep sending servant after servant to continually be beaten and mistreated? But this is exactly what God did. In verse 13 the owner of the vineyard decides that he will send his son. Surely they will respect his son, even if they have not respected all of his servants. The sending of the son is the last resort. This is the last opportunity. Surely they will respect him. No one more important could have been sent. Luke has shown us that Jesus is the Son (Luke 3:22; 9:35) and therefore Jesus is referring to himself as the sent Son who has come to look for fruit for the Father.

APPLICATION: *The amazing grace of God.* Is God not amazing? God sends servant and prophet to warn the people to turn back to him. Prophet after prophet is sent calling for the people to listen to him, to love him, and come to him. The people not only reject every prophet that came, but they were each mistreated. Each prophet was persecuted. Why does God keep sending prophets? Why does God keep sending messengers even though they are mistreated each time? This parable depicts the limitless depth of God’s love. God wants to save his creation. God will do everything he can to bring people to himself. So he decides to send his Son. This parable reflects the teaching that Paul would declare to the Romans, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Verse 14 reveals the hearts of the leaders of Israel at this time. “Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.” They foolishly think that they can seize the kingdom for themselves. They think the kingdom is theirs. These are temporary farmers working in a vineyard and the vineyard is not theirs. The Father owns this vineyard and they are only workers, not owners. But they think they are owners. In reality, this pictures the heart of human rebellion against God. They do not want to be servants. They want to be lords over the vineyard. They think they can do whatever they like in this kingdom. They think that they answer to no one. God stands in the way of these plans. So they throw out the servants and throw the son out of the vineyard and kill him. Notice again that Jesus is not going to be surprised at anything that is about to happen. He is predicting his rejection and his death.

APPLICATION: *Seizing the kingdom*. There are a number of ways that we can seize the kingdom for ourselves that we need to consider. Having the attitude that what matters is what I want is to attempt to seize the kingdom for ourselves. Here is what I mean. When we worship the way we want to worship than the way God says, we are supposing we can seize the kingdom for ourselves. When we determine which commands we will obey and which ones we will not follow, we are attempting to seize the kingdom for ourselves. When we want to keep our traditions rather than listen to the teachings of God and carefully examine his word we are seizing the kingdom for ourselves. When we look at Israel historically, this is what we see the nation doing. Rather than seeking the ways of God, they thought they were in charge and acted like they were focus. Everything was about them. God was about them. Life was about them. They did not see that everything is about God. Worship is about our Lord. Life is about our Lord. Everything we do does not go through the test of whether it is something we like or want but if it is what God desires. Go back to verse 10. What was supposed to be happening? The tenants were supposed to be giving to the owner. They acted like God was to be giving to them. The vineyard is not theirs. We must be about giving to God. Life is about what we give to him.

Jesus asks an important question in verse 15: "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?" Jesus does not look for a response but tells them what the owner will do in verse 16. The owner will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others. The owner's response is judgment. Notice their response. "Surely not!" They cannot believe it. They cannot believe that what they are doing is worthy of judgment and that the vineyard would be taken away from them. God is going to give the Gentiles the opportunity to enter the kingdom and belong to him and judgment is going to fall on the Jewish nation (which we will read about in chapter 21). But they cannot believe that they will be judged.

So Jesus proves his teaching by quoting Psalm 118:22 and asks them what the prophecy means. Turn to Psalm 118 and notice that this psalm is a declaration of praise and hope in God. Verse 1 begins that all should give thanks to the Lord because his steadfast love endures forever. Verses 5-7 show the tone of the psalm as the psalmist looks to God as a deliverer from the enemies. The point is that the enemies will be severely judged. Therefore the Lord is his strength, his song, and his salvation. Now let's read verses 19-24.

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. 20 This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. 21 I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. 22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. 23 This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. 24 This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:19-24 ESV)

The righteous enter through the gate of the Lord. Though people had rejected Israel as unsuitable, God had chosen her to be the cornerstone for his great plan for the world. Think about how powerful this message is as Jesus uses this as a quotation for what the leaders are doing. The impact of this message is greater when we recognize that the psalmist goes on to say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Psalm 118:26). Jesus ties the righteous to those who are proclaiming him as the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Jesus reminds them by quoting the psalm that they are the ones who are rejecting the king. A psalm of national comfort now indicts them for their unfaithfulness. The King and his faithful followers who face rejection will meet God's acceptance and exaltation. We can see why this would be a frequently quoted passage in the New Testament. The Christians would be the rejected and despised people but they are receiving God's acceptance and would be vindicated in time. Jesus will receive the ultimate vindication. They are rejecting Jesus and will take him outside the city to be killed. But the rejected stone will shortly become the cornerstone when he raises from the dead three days later. Verse 18 explains what will happen, which comes from Isaiah's prophecies (cf. Isaiah 28:16;

8:14-15). The stone becomes a point of stumbling. Regardless how the stone meets the rejector, the fate of the rejector is not good. A collision with the stone will leave you shattered.

APPLICATION: *Rejecting the Son*. The parable shows the foolishness of our rebellion against God. Notice the facets of our foolishness. First, we are rebelling in the face of his grace. God has given us blessings and kindness only for us to reject him as the giver of these things. Second, we are rebelling in the face of his patience and mercy. God has done everything he can to save us from our destruction. We are by nature children of wrath and God is correcting that problem by sending his prophets and by sending his Son. Yet, because we want to live how we want to live, we reject his merciful patience toward us sinners. Third, we are rebelling in the face of his kingship. We can rebel all that we want but it does not change the fact that Jesus is the cornerstone. Reject the stone all that you want, but he is the cornerstone and it was the Lord's doing. Rebellion against the king does not make sense because he rule is established and will not be overthrown. There is no alternative but to submit to the king (illustrated with presidential elections. Once elected, there is nothing else that can be done but to submit). Fourth, we are rebelling in the face of his judgment. Anyone who stands against is going to be crushed and broken into pieces. Our rejection of Jesus will bring judgment. We have seen this in the last couple of lessons from Luke's gospel. Doing nothing brings judgment because it is a rejection of Jesus' command to take our mina and make a profit. Living how we want to live brings judgment because we reject the blood of Jesus and casting his goodness away as nothing. Let us not be foolish like these tenants. Let us give to God the glory, honor, and fruit that he is worthy of receiving from us.

Playing Games With Jesus Luke 20:19-44

We are in the midst of the twentieth chapter of Luke's gospel where the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem are challenging Jesus' authority. Jesus is teaching in the temple complex every day. He is cleansing the temple by teaching the very words of God. After teaching the parable of the wicked tenants, verse 19 tells us that the leaders are now looking for a way to arrest him. But they do not just want to imprison Jesus. They want to arrest him and hand him over to the Roman authorities for execution (20:20). Luke 19:47 told us that they are looking to destroy Jesus. They want him killed but they cannot do it themselves because they are fearing the crowd. So they are going to play some games with Jesus. They are going to present Jesus with some difficult questions so that they can catch him in his words (20:20). But they are not trying to get answers for Jesus. They have sent spies. They are pretending to be sincere. They look like they really care. Listen to verse 21. "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God."

To see the relevance of what we are about to study, I want to ask you if you are playing any games with Jesus. You may wonder what I mean by that. What issue is keeping you from full surrender to Jesus? What is holding you back from exploring a deep relationship with Jesus? What are you using to think that you do not have to draw near to Jesus? As you think about that, let's look at the games these religious people are playing with Jesus.

Taxes (20:19-26)

The question the spies bring to Jesus is this: "Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" The ESV does a good job here by translating the question about tribute. This is not a generic question about taxes. It is a question about a particular tax: the tribute tax, also called a poll tax. This was a payment made by the people of one nation to another, with the implication that this is a symbol of submission and dependence. The Roman Empire had conquered the Palestinian lands. Therefore every individual was pay a tribute tax as a symbol of your submission to nation, and the tribute was paid to Caesar. This tribute tax represented Roman sovereignty over Israel. Each year as they paid this tax it was a reminder of their subservience to Rome. You can imagine the hatred the people had for paying this each year. They were paying money to live on the land that God had given to them back in the days of the exodus. Therefore, the question poses what seems to be unbreakable dilemma. If Jesus says not to pay the tribute tax, then Jesus is directly challenging Rome, which would garner the favor of the people but would be the charge of treason the leaders need to hand him to Pilate. If Jesus says to pay the tribute tax, then Jesus will lose his popularity with the people and will afford the leaders the chance to arrest him. This is all set up in verses 19-20. The leaders cannot arrest him because of his popularity. To get around the popularity they will try to get him to speak treason and hand him to the governor. Any answer Jesus gives is a win for the religious leaders. Back in 6-7 AD, a man named Judas fiercely opposed this tribute tax and led an uprising with the battle cry: "No tribute that puts God's land and people under the control of foreigner."

Jesus' answer is masterful. The portrait on the coin represented submission to Rome. We are called to be good citizens in both kingdoms. While our citizenship is in heaven, according to the apostle Paul, this is not a license to neglect or forsake the obligations of the government under which we live. Living under and supporting a government does not violate one's commitment to God. In fact, Jesus is teaching that part of our Christian duty is to give what the government requires. This is an important message to understand because there are some religious groups that we teach we are not to yield to the government we live under because we are citizens of heaven. But that is not how Jesus understood our

position. Give to the government what it asks of you and give to God what God asks of you. We are created in the image of God and therefore we belong to God. To render to God what is his means that we will give to God faithful service on behalf of his kingdom in the midst of the nations. We are called to serve and to display righteousness and integrity in the midst of a world that does not acknowledge sin or God. The immoral character of a nation is not grounds for challenging the nation politically or socially.

Now here is where the teaching is interesting. Back in the parable of the wicked tenants the point was made that the prophets were sent for some fruit from the vineyard only to be mistreated and sent away empty-handed (20:10). The people are not giving God what belongs to God, but they are giving to the Roman Empire what belongs to it. Consider the power of what Jesus is saying. How easy it is for us to carry out our duties as citizens of the United States of America but refuse to carry out our duties as citizens of the kingdom of heaven! Give to God what is God's. Our citizenship of your country is not an excuse to not give to God what belongs to him. And our citizenship in heaven is not an excuse to not give to the country what belongs to it.

Resurrection (20:27-40)

The Sadducees now make their attempt to discredit Jesus. The Sadducees, as we are told in verse 27, did not believe in the resurrection. Acts 23:8 records that they did not believe in angels either. The Sadducees have a question that had apparently won a number of converts to their belief system. Verse 28 records what the Law of Moses, which is found in Deuteronomy 25:5. If a man's brother died and that brother had a wife with no children, it was the duty of the man to marry her and produce children so that she could be provided for. This was the social security of the Law of Moses. The Sadducees came up with quite a problem. Imagine there are seven brothers and each one dies without children after marrying this woman. This is quite a woman who is able to survive seven different brothers. I think she would get the label, "widow maker" at this point. The question is in verse 33: "In the resurrection, whose wife will the woman be?" Seven men were married to her so whose the husband that she will be living with in the resurrection?

Jesus responds that marriage is not part of the age to come. Life in the coming age is different than life now. We will no longer be living a flesh life but a spiritual life. It is not legitimate to project earthly conditions into the future age. We do not know what heaven will be like. We cannot understand what the resurrection and age to come will be like because it has not been revealed to us. To assume the conditions of this life as similar to the conditions in the future eternal life is a mistake. We are spiritual beings that do not marry and do not die. Things are completely different in eternal life. Jesus' first point is that we cannot use what we know in this life as the metric by which we determine how heaven will be. We can do the same thing. I won't get exhaustive in all the guessing that goes on about what life will be like in heaven. But allow me to address one in particular. How can we know each other in heaven if the loved ones that I know from this life are not there? The conclusion is often drawn that we will not know each other in the life to come. I believe what Jesus teaches here is important for us. The way things operate in this life is not how things will operate in the next life. I do not have an answer to that question. What I know is that we will be in Paradise, with God, and we will all be gathered together. I will let God sort out the details.

The second response goes to answering the question whether there is a resurrection. Jesus is very clear in verse 37. The dead are raised. There is no doubt or question about it. Death is not the end of our existence. The dead are raised. Jesus uses the words of Moses at the burning bush where Moses calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. The point is that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Why is God the God of the living? Because they are all alive before God. The point is that only living people can have a God. They must be alive because God is

ascribed to them. We saw this truth in Luke 16 where Jesus told us about the rich man and Lazarus. The surprising twist in the story was that the beggar was in comfort with Abraham and the rich man was in torment, separated from Abraham. Life in the age to come is not like this life and, yes, there is a resurrection.

Who Is Jesus? (20:41-44)

But this is not the end of the scene. After silencing the scribes and the Sadducees, Jesus does not let them walk away. Remember, we started this lesson considering that these leaders are playing games with Jesus. They will not approach him in sincerity but have something in their hearts causing them to reject him. So Jesus is going to turn the tables and ask them a question. Here's his question from the scriptures: how can the Christ be David's son when David calls him Lord? The quotation of scripture comes from Psalm 110.

Jesus told a parable earlier in this chapter showing that he is the Son sent from the Father who they are going to kill. Jesus is going to drive that teaching even deeper. How can David call his son, the coming Messiah, Lord? Notice that Jesus does not answer this question and the Jewish leaders do not answer this question. The Matthew account tells us that no one was able to answer him a word and see that here in Luke in verse 40.

The implication of the teaching is clear. The Messiah must be God. Why else would King David call him Lord? The Messiah has to be more than a mere man for David to submit to him and call him Lord. Somehow he is greater than David, has authority over David, though David is the king. Jesus is going to be killed which will lead to his exaltation and enthronement. To sit at the right hand is to be exalted to a position of honor. The apostle Paul summarizes this truth as he begins his letter to the Romans:

3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:3-4 ESV)

He is the Son of God, the Messiah, who has come to save the world from their sins.

Conclusion

Let us return to verse 35 because Jesus makes a subtle point to the Sadducees and before the crowd in the temple complex. "But those who are considered worthy to attain to that age." Not everyone is going to be counted worthy to enter in and experience the age to come. At the beginning of the lesson I ask what it was that was keeping us from enjoying Jesus and having a deep relationship with him. Jesus has an answer for whatever is holding us back. He is offering you life. We must give to God what is God's if we are to be counted worthy of the blood of Jesus to cover our sins. Give to God what is God's. What is God's? Everything. Everything belongs to him. To be counted worthy of partaking in the age to come is give him everything.

Authenticity vs Showmanship Luke 20:45-21:4

Jesus is in the temple teaching the people every day. It is the last week of Jesus' life on the earth, his final days before his crucifixion. Jesus has stumped the Jewish leaders, asking a question from Psalm 110. How is Christ David's son when David calls him "Lord?" The answer is that the Messiah is God. There is no other answer. The Messiah is more than human such that King David would call him "Master." Jesus is not done with this group. Luke 20:45 tells us that Jesus is teaching in the hearing of all the people in the temple courts. He is preaching in front of his disciples. He is preaching in front of the crowds. He is preaching in front of these Jewish leaders who are looking for a way to have Jesus arrested and executed. Jesus is going to teach us about the necessity of serving from the heart rather than serving out of pretense or show.

Showmanship (20:45-47)

Jesus begins with a warning. "Beware!" Watch out for the scribes! Watch what they are doing and do not be like them. What are the scribes doing? First, they like to walk around in long robes. They wear clothes to be noticed by people. They wanted people to know that they were religiously important. So they wore these expensive robes so that people who know who they were. We see this in the religious world today. We see the teachers wearing robes to set them apart from the rest of the Christians. We see cardinals wearing red robes, popes wearing special hats and long robes, fathers wearing white collars, pastors wearing outfits, and reverends wearing robes. Jesus condemns those who set themselves apart by their dress, trying to draw attention to themselves as someone important or someone spiritual. We can do the same thing and I find it just as disturbing. When we think that the preacher should wear a certain outfit or have certain clothes because he is the preacher, then we are falling into the same trap. Wearing a suit to make sure people know that you are the preacher is just as wrong as wearing robes, collars, or other outfits. Attention is to be drawn to God, his glory, and his word.

Second, they love formal greetings in the marketplaces. They want people to give them a special greeting rather than treating them like everyone else. So they would heap titles on themselves. We see the same problem in the religious world today again. People are called by titles rather than by name. People are called cardinal, father, reverend, priest, pastor, and the like. Again, we are not drawing attention to ourselves. Our attention is focused squarely on the Lord. You call me Brent. Just Brent and nothing more. I do not have a title. I have descriptions for what I do: evangelist, teacher, minister, servant, preacher. But these are not titles but descriptions of what I do. But I am not greater than you. I am not more important than you. There is nothing special about who I am or what I do. By God's grace I am able to teach the gospel of Jesus. The only formal greeting that we see is that we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Third, they love the best seats in the synagogue and sat in the places of honor at the feast days. Luke addressed this issue earlier in Luke 11:43 as he taught about our need for humility in serving Jesus. Notice the consistent point that Jesus is making. We are not suppose to wear things that draw attention to ourselves. We are not to sit in a way that draws attention to ourselves. We are not to have people say things that set us apart from everyone else. The golden rule of the Law is to be applied: do to each other as you want people to do for you.

Fourth, they engaged in poor treatment of the needy. We are not told exactly what the scribes were doing to the widows' homes so that Jesus could say that they are devouring them. It does not really matter. The point seems to be that rather than providing for them and taking care of them as the scriptures from the Old and the New Testaments teach, they were taking money from them. Rather than

giving, they were taking. We see this in the religious world today. Those who are in need of help are often ripped off by people who claim to be teachers of God's word. Our purpose is not to take from each other but to give to each other. God wants us to have a heart gives to others. When we see a need that we can fill, we are to give our money, give our time, give our possessions, give whatever it is that we see our brother or sister in Christ needing. How awful it is that churches have turned to being about the money rather than being about doing good for every person who is among us. Rather than a concern for the person and a concern for that person's soul, so many are concerned about you giving money. Churches are about making money. Not only participating in fundraising efforts, but even charging for the gospel. I have seen churches charge money for sermon online or on CD. We are to pay the money to get the gospel, not charge people to listen to God's good news! We will give you a Bible, not charge you for a Bible. We will give you study workbooks, not charge you for them. It is our responsibility to reach the world and not devour people's goods and money in the process. It calls us to be wise stewards of the money you have entrusted to us so that the money is used to help God's people and proclaim God's good news in this community.

Fifth, the scribes are condemned for praying long prayers for appearances. Praying for show. Saying words so that people will think highly of us rather than simply talking to God. Prayer is talking to God. When we are led in prayers, there is no formula. There are not certain words that must be said. Prayer is a conversation with God. We do not say words so that people will think something of us by the way we pray. Just pray your heart. Don't say what others have said in prayer unless that is what is on your heart. It is one of the great blessings of prayer: we get to speak in a open, heartfelt, raw way to God. As parents it is what we want our children to do. Tell us what is happening. Just tell us what you need or what is going on. God wants to know and hear what we have to say to him. What a blessing that God calls us to open, unedited, raw prayer.

Jesus says to not be like the scribes. Their condemnation will be great. Those who pretend to be God's leaders and teachers but are all about themselves and what people think of them will be judged severely by our Lord.

Authenticity (21:1-4)

As Jesus is teaching the crowds to not be like the scribes (one can imagine the scribes in the audience fuming and growing with anger as Jesus condemns them), Luke 21:1 tells us that Jesus sees the rich putting their gifts into the offering box. History tells us that there were 13 trumpet-shaped receptacles in the temple forecourt by the Court of the Women which served to collect the freewill offerings which helped pay the costs of the temple worship. Mark's gospel tells us that they were putting in large sums of money into the offering box. But something catches Jesus' eye. In verse 2 he sees a poor widow and notes that she puts into the offering two small copper coins. The Greek word describing the coin is lepton. This coin was worth about 1/128 of a day's wage. To my calculations this makes the coin in our time worth about a dime. Practically nothing to us and it was nothing to them in terms of financial power. However, the widow is praised because she gave out of her poverty while the others gave out of their abundance.

The message Jesus is teaching is that the heart by which we give and serve matters to God. The amount is not the test. The reason is the test. Here are this rich people putting in their large gifts into the offering box. They are not condemned for it, but it is noted that they are giving from their abundance. The widow is special because she is giving out of her poverty. The "why" matters to God. We must ask the same question of ourselves. Why do we serve our Lord and others? Do we serve because we see this as a duty and requirement or is it our hearts' desire because we love our Lord? Do we worship because we see worship as a duty and checklist that God demand of us or do we worship from our hearts' desire

because we love our Lord? Why do we give? Do we give because the basket is passed and we see it as our obligation to give? Or do we give from the heart, as a cheerful giver, whose cheerfulness is derived from our love for the Lord and all that he has done for us?

The widow is an excellent reminder for us that we do not simply give the leftover or excess to God. We often think of our giving in these terms. When I have extra time I will give God my time. When I have extra money I will give God my money. But we need to consider that it is not a sacrifice to our Lord if it is extra. If I have four cars and one of them sits in the yard and is never used and means very little to me, then it is not a sacrifice for me to let you use it or have it. Sacrifice does not come from our abundance. Sacrifice is the giving from our lack. The widow is an example of one who is rich toward God, not anxious about this life, but seeks first the kingdom of God. She is willing to give everything and leave everything for the Lord.

Conclusion

Authenticity versus showmanship. This is the contrast that Jesus is showing as he teaches the crowds in the temple complex. Is your worship as you sit here today from the heart or as a show because you feel obligated to be here? Is your service from the heart or so that others can see what you are doing? Is our giving from the heart, because we want to give back to our Lord and give to our brothers and sisters in Christ, or is our giving for show? The why matters to God. Nothing is to be done so that glory comes to ourselves. All glory is to be directed to God. All attention is to be given to him and not toward ourselves. Beware of the scribes! Do not be like them. Be like the widow who gave from heart, did not give to be seen, and gave from our poverty.

The Days of Vengeance Luke 21:5-38

The fifth verse of Luke 21 is an important sentence to read carefully because it sets the direction of the discussion and teaching that Jesus is about to give. There are some (his disciples) who are speaking about the temple in Jerusalem, how it was adorned with beautiful stones. What Herod was doing in his renovation of the temple was amazing and beautiful. Herod was a master architect, an amazing designer and builder. Archaeologists have uncovered many architectural feats that Herod built in the Palestine region. Josephus records that the way the sun shone on the temple was brilliant because of the white marble on the building. So the disciples are pointing out the amazing construction of the new temple. But Jesus says something shocking. "The days are coming when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (21:6). We must recognize that the destruction of the temple is not the fall of another building. The destruction of the temple represented God's wrath against the nation, the severing of fellowship between God and the nation, and the inability for the Jews to worship God. The temple was the place where God met humanity. To destroy the temple is to end the Jewish age, just as it ended that age in 586 BC when the temple was destroyed and the people were deported from the land. This leads the disciples to ask critical questions. "When will these things be and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" If you were told that the fall of the United States was going to occur, you would want to know the same things. When will it be and what will be the signs that show its nearness? Jesus spends his time answering these questions.

The Signs of The Temple's Destruction (21:6-19)

Jesus begins by describing the signs that will lead us to the destruction of the temple. In verse 8 Jesus begins by noting that there will be many who will claim to be the Messiah and Savior of the nation. But they are not sent from God. They are not the deliverer and they must not follow after them. Further, there are going to wars, disturbances, and uprisings. But even with these things the end will not come immediately. Nations are going to be fighting against other nations. There will be wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilence, and the like occurring. These are going to be heavenly signs, messages to the people as a warning about this coming judgment against the Jewish nation. But before these things happen, Jesus' disciples are going to be arrested and persecuted. But this is going to be their opportunity to give their testimony about to Jesus to the authorities. But don't worry about what you will say, my disciples, because Jesus would give them the words to speak in those circumstances. We see this teaching expanded upon in detail in John 16 as Jesus promises to give his apostles the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. Verse 16 gives more startling information as it would be their own families that would turn them into the civil and religious authorities. Some of them are even going to be killed. We know that James, Peter, and Paul were killed for the cause of Christ. In fact, it is believed that many, if not all, of the apostles, except the apostle John, were killed before the close of the first century. But even though they will be killed for the cause of Christ, they are called to cling to their faith because they will not be destroyed spiritually, though killed physically. By their endurance through persecution they will gain their spiritual lives.

The Events of the Temple's Destruction (21:20-28)

Now Jesus gives the key thing that his followers were to look for. When they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then they would know that the destruction of the temple was near. When the Roman armies began their march upon Jerusalem, the people in the whole region of Judea were to run to the mountains. Those who are in the city were to leave as quickly as possible and those who were out

in the country were not to return to the city. We know historically why Jesus tells them to do this. When the Roman armies surrounded the city, the Jews shut the city for protection and no one was allowed to leave. The Roman siege against Jerusalem lasted for three and a half years. So Jesus says that they need to leave immediately and not turn back to the city or else they will be caught in this siege. These are the days of vengeance (21:22). This is God's execution of judgment on the wicked nation that had turned its back on God. Notice that Jesus says that this will be the fulfillment of what is written. Here is what Moses wrote in Deuteronomy:

47 Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, 48 therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. 49 The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, 50 a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young. 51 It shall eat the offspring of your cattle and the fruit of your ground, until you are destroyed; it also shall not leave you grain, wine, or oil, the increase of your herds or the young of your flock, until they have caused you to perish.

52 "They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land. And they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the LORD your God has given you. 53 And you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you. 54 The man who is the most tender and refined among you will begrudge food to his brother, to the wife he embraces, and to the last of the children whom he has left, 55 so that he will not give to any of them any of the flesh of his children whom he is eating, because he has nothing else left, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in all your towns. 56 The most tender and refined woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because she is so delicate and tender, will begrudge to the husband she embraces, to her son and to her daughter, 57 her afterbirth that comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears, because lacking everything she will eat them secretly, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in your towns. (Deuteronomy 28:47–57 ESV)

This is why Jesus gives his woes to those who are pregnant and those nursing infants. Deuteronomy made it clear that they would eat their own children because the horrors of the siege would be so terrible. Jesus is referring to this text in Deuteronomy, and the people would have known that. This will be the great distress on the land and wrath against this people. Underline the word "this." "This people" refers to the Jewish people. God's judgment will at last have come upon them for persecuting the prophets, apostles, and disciples of Jesus. These are the days of vengeance. They will fall by the sword and be led captive back to Rome. Jerusalem is going to be trampled over by the Romans. This is what Daniel prophesied in Daniel 9:26 and what John saw in Revelation 11:1-2.

And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. (Daniel 9:26 ESV)

Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. (Revelation 11:1–2 ESV)

Now notice verse 25. This is not a new topic. Jesus is not talking about something different. Jesus is continuing in his teaching, "And there will be signs...." Jesus begins to use language that God used through the prophets to describe the fall of a nation. In speaking about the king and the nation of Babylon, Isaiah prophesied:

Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. (Isaiah 13:9–10 ESV)

Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger. (Isaiah 13:13 ESV)

In speaking about Judah, the prophet Joel prophesied:

"And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. (Joel 2:30–31 ESV)

Notice how the prophet Haggai explains to the readers what it means for the heavens and the earth to shake:

"Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. (Haggai 2:21–22 ESV)

This language does not describe the end of the world, but the end of the nation. The overthrow of a nation is about to take place. In our context in Luke 21, it means the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. This is further seen in verse 27: "They will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." This is also imagery of God acting in judgment against a nation (cf. Daniel 7:19; Isaiah 19:1; Revelation 1:7). Jesus said these words to Caiaphas that he would see the Son of Man coming in the clouds (Matthew 26:64). It is the coming fall of Jerusalem and the shattering of the nation. Thus, this is the vindication and redemption of God's people who have been persecuted and killed.

Parable of the Fig Tree (21:29-33)

Jesus now tells a parable to explain how these signs are working and why they need to be watching. Jesus said that just like a tree begins to put out leaves then you know that summer is coming very soon. In the same way, when you see these things taking place (that is, the signs of wars and famine and the event of Jerusalem surrounded by armies) then you will know that the kingdom of God is near. This needs some explaining. How can it be that the destruction of Jerusalem is the coming of the kingdom of God and the events and signs leading up to it proving that the kingdom of God is coming? I submit to you that many have created the wrong idea in saying that the kingdom came in Acts 2 as if that was the end of the matter. The scriptures describe the kingdom as being restored in Acts 2 but that was not the end of the story. The kingdom arrived and must now subjugate all the enemies and powers that stand in opposition to Christ the King. The kingdom of God comes powerful against all those who are against him. This is exactly how we see the kingdom used in the book of Revelation.

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." (Revelation 11:15 ESV)

Why has the kingdom of the world become the kingdom of the Lord? The reason is because King Jesus has conquered yet another nation, judging it for its sins and rebellion. Christ continues to rule on

his throne and continues to subjugate the powers of the world under his feet. Therefore, verse 31 is describing that the power of Christ's kingdom is coming against Jerusalem.

Verse 32 is a critical time marker. "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place." Jesus' audience is the "this generation." Any other answer makes no sense and distorts Jesus' words. So many writers want to say this means that the generation that sees these things will not pass away before the end. The reason they do this is to try to make this chapter about the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. But as we have seen, there is no reason to do this to the text. Jesus has not starting talking about something else. "This generation" refers to the generation that is listening to him in his presence. That group of people who are looking at Jesus are going to see these events happen in their lifetimes. These events are coming soon. Verse 33 declares the certainty of these events. Creation is less permanent than this teaching. The word of God has spoken and it will certainly happen.

Be Watching (21:34-38)

Finally, Jesus says they need to be watching because these events were going to happen in their lifetimes. These are things that must soon take place. Jesus admonishes them to watch and pray. Now I understand the struggle people have. So what does this text mean for us? I believe this is one reason why people are so adamant in trying to make this text be in the future so that it has relevance to us. But this is such a mistake because none of the scriptures were written directly to us. But this does not mean that the scriptures do not teach us great and important truths. Obviously there are lessons for us because God wanted these teachings recorded and preserved for all time. So what do we learn?

1. Your enemies are God's enemies and they will be dealt with through judgment
2. Prepare to die to gain your life
3. God's people are vindicated for their faith, but redemption comes through suffering

Betrayal Begins (22:1-6)

We are now the day before Jesus' death. Luke 22:1 tells us that it is the Passover week. The religious leaders are still looking for a way to put Jesus to death. In chapter 20 we saw the leaders give their best efforts to trip Jesus up in his words so that either (1) he would say something treasonous against Rome and therefore be handed over to the Roman authorities for judgment or (2) he would say something unpopular so that the crowds would not care if the Jewish authorities arrested him. But the Jewish leaders have failed in both efforts. However, they are still looking for a way to execute Jesus.

The opportunity now arises. Luke 22:3 tells us that Satan entered the heart of Judas, one of the apostles, to betray Jesus to them. John 13:2 records that the devil had put it into Judas' heart to betray Jesus. This is a description of temptation, quite simply. This is not saying that Judas was forced to do something against his will. This is what Satan does: he puts an idea in our hearts. It is our choice whether we will accept the idea or reject the idea. The sinful creatures that we are, so often we accept the idea. Judas accepts the idea of betrayal. We should be shocked by this. We cannot forget that Judas is an apostle. It is easy for us to not think of who Judas was. Judas was a close companion, a student and disciple of Jesus. Judas was a friend of Jesus. Judas was one of the chosen twelve apostles. I believe that God uses the language of Satan putting this temptation into the heart of Judas to remind us that this event is something far greater than one close companion of Jesus going rogue. This is more than an apostle becoming a double agent. This is the unfolding of a cosmic struggle between Satan and the Lord, not just Judas and Jesus (cf. Revelation 12:4). Satan is at work to crush the plan of the Lord.

We also need to understand the purpose of the betrayal. The Jewish leaders fear the crowds. They cannot go into the temple courts and arrest him because of the backlash that would occur against them. Luke 21:37 tells us that Jesus is not staying in a house at night where they could find him. At night he is going back to the Mount of Olives. He is staying somewhere in the Kidron Valley and Mount of Olives. The Jewish leaders and authorities do not know where he is sleeping. So Judas is agreeing to betray Jesus at a time when there are no crowds around Jesus (22:6). The negotiation of money is made. Judas will betray Jesus for a certain sum, 30 pieces of silver. We are not told why Judas was willing to betray Jesus. The text simply tells us that he was looking for money and was willing to trade Jesus for that sum. We may read this story with disgust. How can Judas do this? How can Judas betray Jesus for money? But I want us to consider what we willingly trade Jesus for. What do we trade Jesus for? How often we will trade Jesus so we can have comfort? We will trade Jesus so we don't have to do anything or only do what we want to do. We trade Jesus to maintain our beliefs and keep the laws of God that we want to keep. We trade Jesus to have more wealth. What will you trade a full life devoted to Jesus for?

Passover Preparation (22:7-13)

It is time for the disciples to make preparations to keep the Passover. Verse 7 contains theologically significant words. It is the day on which the Passover lamb must be sacrificed. The lamb must be sacrificed. There is no alternative. There is no other option. The lamb must be sacrificed so that the people may be delivered. Jesus tells Peter and John to go make preparations for the Passover. This was not that simple. This was a time when every Jew was required to come to Jerusalem. The city swelled to hundreds of thousands of people during the time of the Passover. The Law required a room where the family would eat the Passover meal and keep the regulations of the Law. So it is a natural question in verse 9 by Peter and John. Where are going to prepare this Passover? When we get the lamb, the herbs, the wine, and unleavened bread, where are to take it? Jesus' answer in verses 10-11 remind us of what

Jesus did when he told his disciples to get a donkey for him to ride on into Jerusalem. When they took the donkey just tell the owner that the Lord has need of it and everything will be fine. In the same way, when you go into the city a man carrying a water jar will meet you. Follow him to the house that he goes and tell the master of the house that the Teacher says you need a room to eat the Passover. He will show you a large furnished upper room. Prepare the Passover meal there. Luke is reminding us again that nothing is happening by accident. Everything is planned. Everything is purposed by God. Nothing is happening by accident. The Lord is in control of the events. There are no surprises.

Remember Jesus! (22:14-23)

Jesus immediately shows the predetermined plan of God. Jesus knows what is going to happen. Listen to his statement. He has wanted to share in this Passover with his disciples. It is the last time he is going to eat it with them because he is going to suffer (implication: he is going to be killed). Jesus is going to be killed and will not eat this Passover with them again in the flesh. But he will not remain dead because he says that he will eat it when it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. The Passover is about to be fulfilled. The shadow is becoming reality. The true Lamb of salvation is about to be slain. With these words the Passover commences.

Jesus first takes the cup. Now we should not be thrown by this. I remember reading this as a child and being confused about there being a cup, then the bread, and then the cup. But we need to know that there were many cups at the Passover feast. The first cup was when gratitude was given to God for his acts of provision and salvation. Psalms 113 and 114 were typically sung after drinking the first cup. Notice that this fits what we read in verse 17. They take the cup of the Passover and give thanks. The thanksgiving is appropriate because thanks is being given to God for his provision and salvation. The true Lamb of God has been provided and deliverance from sin is about to come. The Passover from Egypt now takes a new meaning as Jesus becomes our Passover, delivering us from Satan's slavery, setting us free from sin and death. With this context in mind, the memorial of the Lord's Supper begins.

Verse 19 describes the first act. Jesus takes the bread. The bread was unleavened bread during the Passover, symbolizing the removing of filth and wickedness. So if you have ever wondered why we use funny looking bread, you now know that it is unleavened bread, just as Jesus used as he instituted his memorial. After taking the bread, he gave thanks. We also follow this pattern of giving thanks for the offering of Jesus as the sacrifice for sins so that we can be set free. Then he breaks the bread and gives it to his disciples while explaining the meaning of this act. "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

The bread represented something. No one at the table thought that the bread he handed them was his actual body. During the Passover meal the bread represented the affliction of their days when Israel was enslaved in Egypt. No one thought that this was 1500 year old bread. The bread represented the affliction and suffering they experienced while in Egypt. Jesus now changes the meaning of the bread. In the same way, the implication is that the bread they are eating represents his body and is done to remember Jesus. Remember the body of Jesus that was about to suffer and be crucified. Remember the sacrifice he made for you and me. Remember the love that was shown as he would give his life for those who will kill him. He gives his life for those who are sinners. This shows the depths of God's love for us. This is the highest price a human can pay to show that he cares for his creation. We have been amazed a couple weeks ago by the teachers who willingly gave their lives in an effort to protect their children from a wicked coward who came to shoot little children. There is no greater act of love, of sacrifice, and heroism. Giving your life for another is the pinnacle. But can you imagine giving your life for the gunman? It is one thing to give your life for these poor children. But who would give their life for the wicked? Jesus would and Jesus did. We want to think of ourselves as clean, moral, and righteous. But

the scriptures tell us over and over that we are wicked, enemies, children of wrath, and despicable because of our sinfulness. But God being rich in mercy gave Jesus to die. That is what we are to remember as we take the bread. Remember the death of Jesus. Remember that your sins and mine put him on that cross.

Then Jesus took the cup after eating the bread. The "likewise" tells us that he divided the cup and gave thanks just like he did with the unleavened bread. Verse 18 tells us that the contents of the cup was fruit of the vine, which refers to grape juice or wine. Jesus explains what this cup represents. "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." The fruit of the vine that we take remembers that it was the blood of Jesus that was needed to establish a covenant with us so that we could be forgiven. To "pour out the blood" means to be murdered (cf. Genesis 9:6; Isaiah 59:7; Ezekiel 18:10). Jesus is allowing himself to be killed so that a new covenant could be enacted. This is what Jeremiah prophesied, that the days were coming when a new covenant would be made (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Moses spoke of the blood of the covenant as a pledge between us and God to do all that God has commanded us to do in this covenant (Exodus 24:8). Fellowship with God, communion with God, now becomes possible through the death of Jesus.

However, Jesus drops a bombshell. The one who betrays Jesus is sitting at the table. Jesus is going to give his life just as was determined. Nothing is a surprise. Everything is happening according to plan. But the betrayer is sitting in their very midst.

Conclusion

The meal we partake is a memorial to Jesus. Great events deserve great memorials. We rightly spend millions on memorial to remember wars and lives lost in those battles. We build monuments to important presidents in our countries history. We write books to remember the actions of people who did great things in history. Isn't it shocking what a simple memorial God has given us to remember the greatest person and the greatest act ever made? But the power of the memorial should not be lost. Just as going to a monument and memorial causes us to pause, to reflect, to consider, and be moved, so we should do the same as we approach the body and the blood of Jesus.

Reflect on one more thing. Why was this the day that Jesus chose to institute the memorial? Why not any other day in his life? The reason is that the power of the Passover was intended to come through. Jesus' disciples are eating the Passover meal but Jesus taking that meaningful moment and applying it to himself. He is our Passover. He is our deliverer. It is his blood that causes God's wrath to pass over us. We do not receive what we deserve because Jesus has given his life for us. The apostle Paul said that Christ is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7). Our Passover has been sacrificed. Let us live in the knowledge that we have been delivered and we owe Jesus everything. And let us remember that every Sunday as we partake of the memorial.

In the first half of Luke 22 Jesus has taken the Passover meal and created a memorial to his death, which we call the Lord's Supper. Jesus has announced his impending death with this memorial. He has further revealed that one of his own apostles is going to betray him. One of the very people who is participating in this memorial supper will be the one to betray Jesus. It seems that this questioning of who could possibly be the betrayer degenerates into pride and selfish thinking. An argument breaks out over who is the greatest. I read this and I think to myself that this is simply unbelievable. Even more unbelievable is that they had this argument earlier as recorded in Luke 9. Jesus has eagerly desired to enter into this moment with his disciples to share with them this communion in which he established his memorial. The disciples are arguing over who is the greatest. What a polar opposite to the meaning of communion! Isn't it amazing how quickly we turn to self-centered pride? We can sit here and partake of the Lord's Supper, recalling his death and committing ourselves to the covenant of Christ, only to say "amen" to the closing prayer and start back into our selfish thinking and prideful actions.

Now consider the foolishness of this dispute. Jesus and his apostles are in an upper room and have completed the memorial to Jesus. Who is the greatest in the room? Who should be regarded as the greatest? It is not any of the disciples. Jesus is the greatest. Who is the greatest in this room today? None of us are the greatest. Jesus is the greatest. He exclusively holds that title. None of us are to be regarded as great. Only Jesus is to be regarded as great. So Jesus is going to show us what true greatness is in the kingdom of God. Jesus will define for us what greatness truly is.

True Greatness — What It Is Not (22:25-26a)

Jesus begins by implying that the way the disciples are thinking and acting is the way the world thinks and acts. Worldly kings exercise their lordship. Worldly people lord their power over others. Leadership is not telling people what to do. Using your authority to make people do things is to lord your power over them. This is what the world does. We experience this at work and we experience this with those who have authority. They simply tell us what to do and we have to comply. The apostle Peter gave the warning in his letter that shepherds who lead the flock that is among them are not to lord it over the flock (1 Peter 5:3). I am so saddened to see how often this is how shepherds exercise their authority in many churches today. They think they have the right and the power to tell people what they can and cannot do. Deacons believe they have some power and can tell people what to do. Preachers think they have authority to compel people to do something. Leadership is not telling people to do something. We do not lead by an exercise of power and authority. So this is Jesus' first point. Leading is not bossing others around. Leading is not telling people what to do. Leading is not using your authority to compel people to do something.

Second, Jesus describes these in authority as being called "benefactors." This was a title that existed in the Greco-Roman world. The wealthy would use their wealth to give gifts with strings attached. They would do certain things and give gifts with the expectation of things in return such as service and honor. Worldly people not only command people to do things, but they will do things for others to put that person into debt so that there is an expectation of return. Jesus says that this is not how we become great either. We are not doing good so that they will have to do something for us. We are not to try to force obligations out of people through our wealth.

True Greatness — What It Is (22:26b-27)

Now Jesus tells his disciples what true greatness looks like. In verse 26 Jesus says that the greatest will become the youngest. This does not really translate too well in our society. The youngest was the one who received the menial tasks in the family. Young people had the lowest place and the aged people were respected and venerated. This fits with the rest of the verse: "and the leader as the one who serves." Leadership is not telling others what to do. Leadership is doing the work yourself. Leadership is not in speaking but in doing. The greatest person is not the one who strives to be on top, but the one that chooses the bottom.

Listen to the question Jesus asks in verse 27. "For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves?" Jesus answers the question the same way we would answer it. We would all say that the one sitting at the table is the one who is greater, not the one who serves. But Jesus turns that thinking upside down as he goes on to say, "But I am among you as the one who serves." The way the world looks at things is not the way God looks at things. Jesus is the picture of true greatness. But what did Jesus come to do? He came to serve. Jesus is the one who is serving. Jesus is our model for true greatness.

To live like Jesus means that we find true greatness in living for others rather than living for ourselves. We forget ourselves for the sake of others. We do not tell people what to do. We do the work. We serve and we do not tell other people that we are doing it. Leadership is in serving.

Greatness is doing the thing no one else wants to do. Great people are those who clean the building. Great people are those who make the Lord's Supper. Great people are those who teach the children. Great people are those who send cards. Great people are those who visit the sick. Great people are those who greet our guests. Great people are those who teach their neighbors the gospel. Greatness is found in doing the behind the scenes work. Ladies, greatness is not in leading worship. You should never look with jealousy or envy at preachers or shepherds because you cannot function in that capacity because of the Lord's command (cf. 1 Timothy 2:12-15). Instead, men, we need to see that greatness is not in song leading, preaching, and the like. Greatness is doing the things that are unseen but necessary. Great people serve and no one notices the serving that they do. We have so many great people in this church who are serving in such important ways, ways that you and I do not see. If the only service we will offer is something that is seen, then we are seeking greatness in a worldly way that is condemned by God. Jesus does not offer titles. He hands out towels to serve.

True Greatness Jesus Gives (22:28-30)

Jesus now makes a point about the greatness Jesus will bestow on his apostles. The "you" in verse 28 is plural. The apostles have stayed with him through his trials and Jesus is going to assign to them a kingdom. They are going to share in Christ's kingdom, eating and drinking at his table in his kingdom, sitting on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. This is a beautiful picture. Every Jew expected to sit with the patriarch at the messianic banquet. The Dead Sea Scrolls record the Qumran community's expectation of feasting at the Messiah's table.

Now it seems impossible that as the disciples are arguing over who is the greatest in the kingdom and Jesus blesses that by saying at the final judgment these twelve apostles will be sitting on thrones judging the Jews. Rather, Jesus is picturing the apostles fully participating in the kingdom of God. In fact, verse 29 says they are assigned the kingdom. Consider that the apostles were given authority over Christ's kingdom. That is how the gospel ends as Christ gives his authority to the apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. It is this gospel written by Luke and its sequel, Acts, where we read the apostles having authority over Israel and judging Israel through the preaching and teaching of the gospel because they were speaking the very words of God. Their greatness would come

through the fact that they were serving Jesus, serving Israel, and serving the world by proclaiming the very words of God, the good news, throughout the earth.

Lessons For Today

1. Jesus is great; we are not.
2. True greatness is not by compulsion or power. True greatness is found through serving.
3. Great people do the work others don't want to do. Great people do the work behind the scenes.

Sifted Like Wheat
Luke 22:31-34

Jesus and his chosen twelve were in the upper room for the Passover which Jesus has transformed into a memorial for his coming death and resurrection. There is a betrayer among them which has caused the disciples to argue among themselves as to who is the greatest. Jesus taught them that greatness in the kingdom of God is not about having power but about serving. Leadership and authority and sitting on thrones is about serving, by doing the tasks that no one else wants to do. Now Jesus needs to warn his disciples.

Sifted By Satan (22:31)

Jesus says something shocking to our scene in verse 31. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you all, that he might sift you all like wheat." The "you" in both places is plural. So Jesus addresses Peter who represents the twelve apostles. All of the apostles are under this threat. Satan is demanding to have all of you. This causes me to shudder and I think it should cause all of us to shudder. Satan is asking for you. Satan is demanding to have you. Satan wants to sift you all like wheat. A grain would be put into a sieve, where the head of the grain was taken apart. To be sifted like wheat is a metaphor for being taken apart. Satan is trying to ruin Peter and the apostles and leave them in pieces. Does this not remind you of exactly what we read in the first two chapters of the book of Job? Satan does the same thing to Job. Satan approaches the Lord in heaven and asks to essentially try to ruin Job and leave him in pieces.

We see something really important about who Satan is and what he is doing. Satan is not merely an accuser. He is not only standing there to condemn us when we sin but he causes reason for accusation. Satan is an accuser and an attacker of our faith. Satan wants to take our faith apart. Do we think of Satan's work in those terms? Do we see the spiritual battle revealed to the eyes of the apostles and ourselves? Simon Peter is particularly under this threat of having his faith shredded. Please notice that Jesus does not call him by the name he gave him which was Peter, meaning rock. Rather, Jesus goes back to his birth name, Simon. You are not going to be a rock at this moment, Simon. Satan is attacking your faith and demanded to take you apart.

We need to recognize the power of Satan. Satan is real and his power is great. Do you feel that Satan is trying to take your faith and leave it in pieces? Do you recognize that Satan wants to sift and ruin you? You are under attack if you are trying to profess faith in Jesus and give your life in passionate pursuit of him! The apostle Paul says that the evil one is shooting flaming arrows at you (Ephesians 6:16)!

Jesus, Our Intercessor (22:32)

But listen to what Jesus says he did. Jesus says that he prayed for Peter. Please note that in verse 32 all four instances of the word "you" and "your" are singular. So Jesus is directing this particularly to Peter. Listen to these wonderful words of hope. Satan is trying to leave you in pieces, but I have prayed for you so that your faith may not be lost. Notice that Jesus does not pray that Peter would not sin in that moment. Jesus knew that Peter was going to deny him three times. But the issue at hand is not simply the sin but what will happen next. What will Peter do after he fails the Lord? Peter will sin. But this is not a surprise. Everyone will sin. Everyone will fall short. Everyone lets our Lord down. The question is not if you are going to sin. The question is what are you going to do after that. Is Satan going to be successful and shred your faith to pieces? Our effort is not only to avoid sin, but also to not allow our faith to be shattered when we fall short. What will we do once we sin? It is so easy to be demoralized by our failures. It is easy to want to quit because of our shortcomings. Perhaps the easiest thing to do is

give up. What I mean by this is that we still come to church and do some of the external things, but we let our heart grow cold. We no longer passionately pursue Jesus because we just are not good enough. But we must remember something. We can never be good enough. Jesus came because we are not good. But what will we do after we sin? What will become of our faith after we have fallen short?

Jesus says that he has prayed on behalf of Peter. Jesus is making intercession. What does this mean for Peter? Listen to the rest of verse 32. Peter can turn again and strengthen the brothers. This word “turn” that Jesus uses is the same word found in Acts 3:19 when Peter preached to Jerusalem, **“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19 ESV)**. The word “turn” is speaking about repentance (cf. James 5:19-20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Peter 2:25). James used this word to speak of one who wanders from the truth but is brought back (James 5:19-20).

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. (James 5:19–20 ESV)

It was not going to be over for Peter. Jesus had made intercessor so that Peter could turn again and strengthen the brothers. I believe this is part of Job’s story also. We are reading Job and watching what he will do. Satan says that this suffering will tear Job’s faith to shreds. Does the story tell of Job’s perfection? Absolutely not. Job says things that he ought not to have said, even by his own admission (Job 40:3-5). But what happens at the conclusion when God addresses the foolishness and sinfulness of Job? Listen to Job’s words: **“Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6)**.

What about us? I want us to see that what Jesus does for Peter is what he does for us.

Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:23–25 NRSV)

34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Romans 8:34–35 ESV)

This is what it means that Jesus makes intercession for us. Our failure does not have to be the end of our faith. Jesus is interceding. Jesus is doing something because of our failure. We can come back to God. Jesus has acted so that we can turn again. Sin does not have to be the falling from the faith.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25 NRSV) It is Jesus that keeps us from falling. We fail. Jesus intercedes. We turn again. Oh, amazing grace! What a wonderful Savior!

Our Proud Hearts (22:33-34)

There is only one thing that keeps us from this great reality and hope: our pride. Peter does not see that he needs this intercession. Listen to his words. “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” Peter thinks he’s got this. He is not going to sin. He is not going to stumble. Satan can try to sift me like wheat but I will go to prison and to death! Jesus says no. Peter will deny Jesus three times between this night and the sun rise. In the next few hours Peter will deny Jesus, not just once, but three times.

How ready we often think we are in our faith! Yet we are unaware of our coming failure. Do not assume an area of strength. Satan is demanding to have you, to sift you, and leave you in pieces. Satan will take any attack against you. Never say that you would never commit some particular sin. Do not be

proud. Do not think it cannot happen. Pride goes before our fall. We need to humbly get on our knees and recognize that if it happened to someone else, it can also happen to me. Be watchful. Be prayerful. Be careful. It is a time of spiritual danger. This is what Jesus is talking about in a couple hours when he sees his disciples sleeping and not praying at this moment. We simply do not recognize the spiritual danger we are in. We think we are strong. We think that we do not need help and we do not see the fiery arrows flying right at our face. Be watchful and pray!

Conclusion

1. Isn't it amazing that God can know our sins ahead of time and still act as he does toward us? Truly amazing grace!

2. We are under attack by Satan. He wants to destroy our faith and leave us in shreds. Every Christian will be sifted. Jesus is interceding for you. What will you do after your failure? Will you turn again to God and strengthen your fellow Christians?

This is the final teaching of Jesus to his disciples. After these final words, Jesus and his disciples are going to leave the upper room in Jerusalem and go out to the Mount of Olives. What Jesus is going to tell his disciples is critical to their future work and mission.

The World of Hostility (Luke 22:35-36)

Jesus begins this final instruction with a question. **"When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?" (Luke 22:35 ESV)** The question refers back to the first commissioning Jesus gave to his disciples. The first time we read this was in Luke 9:1-6. There we read Jesus calling the twelve apostles, giving them power over demons and the power to cure diseases, and sending them to proclaim the kingdom of God. He told them to take nothing with them on their journey. They were not to take food, money, or clothes. They were to stay in the homes and towns that received them. Did the apostles lack anything when Jesus sent them out to preach empty-handed? The answer the disciples give is, "No." We see this in Luke 9:6. They went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everyone. Jesus did this a second time which is recorded for us in Luke 10:1-12. Jesus appointed 72 of his disciples to go ahead of Jesus proclaiming the kingdom of God. Notice in verse 4 they were instructed to take nothing with them and verses 7-8 show they were being provided for by the people of the homes they were staying in. These events are the background to Jesus' question. Did you lack anything when I sent you out empty-handed into the villages and towns? No, they did not lack anything. People were responsive. They opened their homes and gave them food to eat and a place to sleep. They were able to depend on the hospitality of the hearers.

Now Jesus is going to send out his apostles, but the situation has changed. No longer will they be able to go out empty-handed preaching the kingdom of God. Jesus says in verse 36, **"But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one." (Luke 22:36 ESV)** Things have changed. Now when they go on mission they will find trouble and suffering. They are not going to find a welcoming world. People are not going to be opening their doors and inviting you in to preach Christ. They will face hostility. The world that has rejected Jesus as the Son of God is going to reject those who proclaim Jesus as the Son of God. The missionary situation has changed and it will be a dangerous time. The situation will be so dangerous that Jesus tells his disciples that if they do not own a sword, they need to sell a cloak and buy a sword. This sword is not a sword to attack people who do not accept their preaching. That is not the message at all. The point is that they would need a sword to defend themselves. The sword shows how they were going to be received by the world as they go out. The world is not going to provide for you nor be hospitable to you. They are going to reject you and attack you. A sword for self-defense would be needed.

We need to recognize that we live in an unprecedented time and in an unusual country. For 237 years this nation has experienced religious freedom. We are able to practice our faith and teach people about Jesus without fear of imprisonment or persecution from the government. That is not the way that it is in other countries. Last week we heard of a Christian teacher being sentenced to eight years in prison in Iran for preaching Jesus. Open Doors USA keeps a list of the top 50 countries that are persecuting Christians. The nations where extreme persecution is reported is in North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Maldives, Mali, Iran, Yemen, Eritrea, and Syria. It is believed that approximately 200 million who profess faith in Jesus are being persecuted or having their human rights limited by government authorities. It is also believed that around 100-300 people who profess faith in Jesus are killed each day. Agencies admit that violence is increasing against Christians around the world.

The reason I bring this up is so that we will consider that we live in an unusual country where we are not persecuted like others.

However, we must not mistake our freedoms to be the norm. Jesus described what would be the norm. The norm was not going to be a friendly reception of the gospel. Jesus is warning them of hostility and persecution. We must be careful that because we have experienced a time of wonderful religious freedom that we are not surprised when hostility begins to intensify against Christians. One of the issues that is going to bring this to a head is God's teaching on homosexuality. As our nation continues to move to make the practice of homosexuality a human right and marriage a right, there is going to be conflict between the church and these rights. We are already seeing hostility increase against Christians because Christians are considered intolerant. Of course, they are intolerant of Christians, which shows the hypocrisy of the situation. But we need to observe that being a Christian does not mean that we will only practice our beliefs and proclaim our faith when it is socially acceptable to do so. Jesus is teaching his disciples that they will be living in a time of hostility. Jesus told them that they would be arrested. When we read the book of Acts we read about the persecution of Christians. Are we prepared to stand individually for Christ and together as a church in the face of hostility? Will we say the words, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29)? Will we stand joyfully during trouble and dangerous times just like the first century disciples of Jesus? Or will we change our beliefs or shrink in our faith as the pressure mounts against Christians?

Numbered With The Outlaws (22:37)

Jesus now amplifies this message by quoting from Isaiah 53 and applies it to himself. The prophecy of the suffering servant, the prophecy of Isaiah that we know so well and often read from when we take the Lord's Supper, is the text Jesus says was speaking about him. Jesus quotes from Isaiah 53:12, **"Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."** (Isaiah 53:12 ESV) In Isaiah 53:12 the word translated "transgressors" means "people who rebel, revolt." The HCSB, NET, and NLT again read, **"because He submitted Himself to death, and was counted among the rebels."** (Isaiah 53:12) The New Testament Greek carries the same meaning. The word "transgressors" in Luke 22:33 means "to act without law; lawless." The HCSB captures the idea well when it reads, **"And he was counted among the outlaws."** The NLT reads, **"He was counted among the rebels."** Jesus would be counted with the lawless.

The timing of Jesus' quotation of this prophecy is interesting. Notice that this quotation is not a reference to Jesus on the cross hanging between two thieves. That is not the time when this prophecy was fulfilled. Nor is the prophecy fulfilled when Jesus is eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. It is at this moment when Jesus is talking with his disciples that this prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled. So let's put the pieces together. Jesus has told them that they are going to preach Jesus in the face of hostility. No longer would they receive a welcome reception for proclaiming the gospel. Instead they would find trouble and suffering for preaching the message. Why are they going to face trouble and hostility? The answer is this quotation in Luke 22:37. To follow Jesus means you are part of the outlaws. To follow Jesus is to be numbered with the outcasts and the rebels. Jesus says the prophecy of Isaiah does not point to the cross but to being with his disciples. They are now the outcasts of society. They are the outlaws of the nation. This does not mean that we try to break the laws of the land. Paul taught clearly that Christians obey the government because it is instituted by God (Romans 13:1-7). But following Jesus will put us in hostility with the government and with the world, not in harmony with them. Jesus was counted as a criminal and suffered a criminal's death. We will be outcasts and rebels for

following him. Do we have faith to stand in such times? Will we follow Jesus and be numbered with the outlaws? Will we be rejected and be considered lawless for the sake of Jesus?

The Disciples Misunderstand (22:38)

The disciples respond to this by saying that they currently have two swords. There are two ways to take Jesus' response. One way to understand Jesus is that he is saying that two swords are enough. Two swords are all the swords you will need. But I do not think this is what Jesus means. We will see on the Mount of Olives that two swords are not enough to protect themselves. The point was not to arm his disciples to go to the Mount of Olives. Everything is going according to Jesus' plan. Nothing is happening by accident. The disciples have to turn and run at the arrest of Jesus because they did not have enough to defend themselves. The other way to understand Jesus is that he is saying it is enough of this talk. It is not the swords that are enough, but enough of this talk. The point would mean that his disciples are completely misunderstanding what he is telling them. The HCSB, NIV, and NLT reflect this meaning in their translations.

"Enough of that!" He told them. (Luke 22:38 HCSB)

"That's enough!" he replied. (Luke 22:38 NIV; cf. NLT)

I believe this makes the most sense of the conversation. Jesus is telling them about their future. No longer will their mission be easy. No longer will people welcome them into their homes to preach. They will be met with hostility and suffering. They will need to go prepared and ready to protect themselves because they are going to be counted as outlaws and rebels in society. This is appropriate because Jesus will be counted as a criminal and outlaw as well. Rather than understanding Jesus to be talking about their mission efforts, they think they need swords right now. So Jesus ends the discussion because they do not grasp what Jesus is telling them yet.

Conclusion

The title of the lesson is Dangerous Christianity. We must recognize that we are called to stand outside of what is mainstream in our society. We are called to stand against popular thinking. We are called to rebel against teachings that stand contrary to the teachings of Jesus. We are going to be considered outlaws and rebels. We will be outcasts as we serve the One who became an outcast and outlaw to save us from our sins. We cannot seek the acceptance of the world. We cannot try to fit into the world. May we truly consider the words of the apostle Peter and what it means to be a Christian in our world today.

Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy at the revelation of His glory. (1 Peter 4:12-13)

Your Will Be Done
Luke 22:39-46

How do you view Jesus? I think it is easy for us to forget that though God, he became human for us and experienced life as we experience life. He was tempted in the same manner that we are tempted. He dealt with the weaknesses of the flesh as we do. He is able to sympathize with us because in every respect he was tempted as we are. This is important to remember as we read this scene in the life of Jesus unfold.

Time of Temptation (22:39-40)

Jesus leads his disciples to the Mount of Olives. This was his custom. This is where Jesus slept at night when in Jerusalem. We know from the other gospel accounts that Judas had already left and made the transaction to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Jesus is left with his other eleven apostles. Notice that Jesus does not change his habits to allude Judas. Jesus knows that Judas is coming. Jesus does not change his habit. Jesus does not decide to leave Jerusalem, knowing that he is about to be betrayed and arrested. Now is the time. Now is the moment for the redemption of the world. Jesus goes to his place on the Mount of Olives with his disciples.

Jesus knows this is the critical moment. When he came to the place where they always stayed, Jesus told his disciples to pray rather than go to sleep. It is the middle of the night by this point in the story. Tonight is a different night. Jesus does not want his disciples to go to sleep and with good reason. Tonight will be a severe testing of their faith. The temptation to deny Jesus will be very great in these moments. Satan is going to sift them. Satan is trying to break apart their faith. But Jesus gives his disciples the solution to temptation. "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." Prayer is the remedy needed to fight the attack of Satan. Pray, my disciples, pray! Friends, the answer to dealing with temptations and sin is a full dependence on God. Pray to the Father. We need to feel a desperate need for communion and connection to our Father in these moments. How unfortunate that so often we do not feel this desperation to cling to our Father in our times of weakness and vulnerability.

Time of Agony (22:41-44)

Jesus is not a hypocrite. He practices what he preaches. He withdraws from his disciples a short distance, kneels down, and prays. We are allowed to see an intense, intimate moment in the life of Jesus. We are allowed to look into the emotional state of Jesus as these betrayal, arrest, and death events are beginning to unfold. Tonight is the night and he falls down on his face in prayer.

We need to recognize that the temptation to not go to the cross is extreme. Satan is doing everything he can to stop Jesus from going to the cross and redeeming the world for its sins. We know this not only from this text but also from what we saw earlier in the life of Jesus. In the temptations of Jesus that we read about in Matthew 4, Satan offers Jesus the kingdom of the earth. The temptation is to receive his kingdom without the cross. Satan is offering Jesus to bypass the cross, to bypass the horror of his betrayal, arrest, crucifixion, and death. Simply bow down because you are the Son of God and Satan will give you the kingdoms of the earth. Move forward in the life of Jesus and consider the confrontation Jesus has with Peter. When Jesus explains that he must suffer many things and will be crucified by the leaders of Israel, Peter says, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you!" (Matthew 16:22). Do you remember what Jesus says to Peter? "Get behind me, Satan!" Not, "Get behind me, Peter." This is the temptation of Satan to not go to the cross. The temptation is to not experience suffering. You are God. You do not have to go through this pain. You have the power to stop all this. You do not need all of

this. Satan's temptations are to achieve glory without the cross. We are reading about the strong pull of Jesus' flesh at this moment.

I want to be honest with you. I love this scene. People are often confused by this scene, but I love this scene. Jesus is not impervious. This is a big deal. Jesus is human. If Jesus is the man of steel who feels no emotions and with great simplicity does the Father's will, then I do not have a high priest that I can relate to. I feel no connection to my Lord if every temptation he faced was no big deal. This whole scene would not be real without this prayer. This prayer shows us his humanity. Jesus is experiencing the pull of his flesh. So Jesus asks if there is another way to let this cup pass from him. Jesus has described this cup on a few occasions with his disciples.

22 Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." 23 He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." (Matthew 20:22–23 ESV)

The cup that Jesus drank would be the same cup that his apostles would drink. Therefore, Jesus is not referring to the cup of God's wrath for that is not what any disciple of Jesus must drink. Rather, this is the cup of suffering. This is the cup of violent suffering that he would endure. His apostles are going to experience this cup of violent suffering also.

But the greatest words are found in verse 42. "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." Jesus placed his life in the hands of God. Jesus has the power to stop all of this. But Jesus' will is not important. Jesus' desire is not important. All that matters is the purpose of God. God's will is the only thing that matters. Even for something that he is being tempted not to do and his flesh is screaming not to do, the will of the Lord is the only factor that matters. Jesus is going to be obedient to the Father, even to the point of death on the cross. This prayer shows us the battle between flesh and spirit. Jesus shows us how to answer that battle. Your flesh does not want to do what God wants it to do. You must obey the will of the Lord. This is humble obedience to your God. We really need to hear these words: our will is not important. Our desire does not matter. If the will of Jesus is disregarded in the face of the will and purpose of God, then our will and desire are certainly of no regard in the face of the will and purpose of God. If we balk at this idea, then we need to reread how the writers of scriptures would often begin their letters and writings calling themselves "servants" or "slaves" of Jesus (cf. Romans 1:1; James 1:1; Jude 1; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1). Servants and slaves do not have a say in the matter. The purpose is the will of the master.

Then verse 43 records another beautiful picture. An angel from heaven strengthens Jesus. God is with those who suffer according to his will. Jesus will not suffer alone. Help comes. God hears his prayer and sends help. Consider that we see angels come to Jesus in only two scenes. Both times it was during the temptation of Jesus. When Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, angels come and serve Jesus (Matthew 4:11). Here now on the Mount of Olives we see an angel coming and strengthening Jesus. We are not told how. We simply accept that angels help in temptation. The writer of Hebrews said the same thing in speaking about angels:

Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14 ESV) We do not know how, but it is a spiritual truth from God.

Verse 44 brings us back to the anguish of Jesus. "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly." Please consider and reflect on what we are being told. Jesus is in agony. The suffering of the cross is incalculable. Jesus is in AGONY. His agony is so great that he is sweating profusely. Please read verse 44 carefully. Luke does not say that Jesus sweat drops of blood. Read it carefully. This is a figure of speech, what we call a simile. His sweat was not blood but came down like drops of blood. The strain and agony is so great that sweat is pouring down from his head as his face is bowed to the ground. So Jesus

increases the intensity of his prayer. In the time of intensity in your life is a time to increase the intensity of your prayers. Jesus is fully cognizant and embraces his agonizing death. So in this moment of great agony and intensity Jesus comes back to his disciples who are sleeping. Luke tells us something important. They are sleeping because they are exhausted from sorrow and grief. Have you experienced that tiredness and exhaustion that comes from crying so many tears and bodily exhaustion from great grief? We experience a little bit of that at funerals or in great times of suffering or trials. Perhaps they understand a little bit of what is about to happen. In either case, diligence in prayer is required, not sleeping. Prayer is the answer to these difficult times. Denial, avoidance, and sleeping are not what we need to do. It is not a time to slink into depression. It is not a time to recoil from God and shut the doors to your life closed. God is with us and will help us through.

Conclusion

1. We must be amazed at the willingness of Jesus to accept the cross for us. We are all tempted to bypass suffering and sacrifice.
2. Jesus shows us how to approach temptation and suffering — repeated prayer. God listens to those prayers and strengthens the one who prays.
3. Entrust our lives into God's hands. God is with those who will carry the cross and follow him.

The Betrayal (22:47-53)

The moment has arrived. While Jesus is telling his disciples again to pray so that they will not enter into temptation, a crowd of people arrive and Judas is leading them. Luke highlights this shocking event. "Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them." The scriptures prophesied that this would be how the Messiah would be treated. **"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me." (Psalm 41:9 ESV)** His friend, his close companion, is the leader of this betrayal. We are told in verse 52 that this crowd consists of the chief priests, temple officers, and the elders of the Jewish nation. They have come to take Jesus by force and they are expecting a scuffle because they are carrying swords and clubs. What a fearful and intimidating scene.

The signal for identifying Jesus to this mob was a kiss. The kiss was the greeting of a friend in that culture. The irony is staggering. The kiss of a friend will be the signal to hand Jesus over to the mob for arrest. As Judas approaches Jesus to kiss him, Jesus asks him something. Literally, the word order is this: "Judas. A kiss the Son of Man betray?" The NRSV tries to carry the weight of that word order. **"Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" (Luke 22:48 NRSV)**

Verses 49-50 show the fearfulness of this scene. The disciples ask, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" But before there is a response from Jesus, one of the disciples (Peter we are told in other gospel accounts) strikes the servant of the high priest and cut his ear off. The disciples have their two swords and they are ready to fight for Jesus. But that is not the plan or purpose of our Lord. Jesus answers, "No more of this!" Jesus is not trying to avoid this moment nor is he going to engage in a physical battle with weapons against his enemies. Amazingly, Jesus touches the servant's ear and heals him.

Jesus then addresses the mob. They have come as if they are arresting a dangerous outlaw. Jesus then points out the hypocrisy of this moment. Every day Jesus was standing in the temple courts teaching. But they would not arrest him there for the fear of the crowds. So they come in the cover of night, away from the crowds, as if Jesus is a dangerous criminal, which he is not. But evil is having its moment right now. The forces of evil are having their way for a time. I think this is an important observation that Jesus makes. The forces of evil are having their way for a time. Evil has its day and Jesus accepts this truth.

The Denial (22:54-62)

So Jesus is seized and led away to the house of the high priest for hearing before the high priest and Jewish leaders. Matthew records that all the disciples left Jesus and ran at this moment (Matthew 26:56). But Peter does not run far. As Jesus is led away, Peter is following at a distance. He is watching, wanting to know is going to happen to Jesus. But this is dangerous to do. He could just as easily be arrested with Jesus. So Peter follows Jesus and his captors to the house of the high priest. In the courtyard of the high priest, they had kindled a fire. The "they" refers back to this mob that arrested Jesus. The temple officers and soldiers are sitting outside in the courtyard around the fire as they wait for the interrogation by the high priest to conclude. Peter comes into that courtyard and sits down among them. This is a very dangerous situation for Peter.

As Peter is sitting by the fire among all these people, a servant girl is staring intently at Peter through the fire. As she continues to examine him, she comes to the realization that and declares, "This man also was with him." A dangerous identification is made. One can easily imagine the fear that ran through Peter as this identification is made. "That is the guy who was with Jesus when we arrested him!" So Peter

denies his association with Jesus. "Woman, I do not know him." We are called to confess Christ and deny ourselves. Peter does the reverse. Peter denies Christ to serve his own interests.

A little later another person make a similar identification of Peter. "You also are one of them." You are one of Jesus' disciples. But Peter responds, "Man, I am not!" Then another hour goes by and another person begins insisting that Peter is a disciple of Jesus. "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." With great force Peter denies his association with Jesus again. "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." While Peter made this final denial, the rooster crowed. We do not know if Jesus was being led out of the high priest's home at this moment or whether from the courtyard one could easily see into the house. In either case, it is at this moment that the Lord turns to look at Peter as he completes his third denial. As the Lord looks at Peter, Peter remembers how Jesus had predicted his three denials this very night. Peter had vehemently declared that he would never deny Jesus and would go to the death for Jesus. But his words were empty. When the time of danger came and when the power of the temptation arrived, Peter denied the Lord three times. So Peter leaves the courtyard and cries bitterly over what he has done. How could this happen? How could a disciple of Jesus be will to betray Jesus? How could the leader of the disciples be willing to deny Jesus?

Denying Jesus

1. The danger of spiritual overconfidence. Luke has painted for us the picture of the problem of spiritual overconfidence. Jesus warned Peter that he would deny him. Peter did not believe him. He declared that these other disciples might fall away but he never would. When on the Mount of Olives, rather than praying in the face of this severe temptation, the disciples were found sleeping. In 1 Corinthians 10 the apostle Paul wrote to those Christians about the failures of Israel in the wilderness. He then gives the lesson of Israel's failure for us: **"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12 NIV)** Spiritual overconfidence is a dangerous attitude. We fall because we do not see or admit our weaknesses. We do not listen to the Lord and prepare ourselves for Satan's attack on our faith. Denying Jesus sounds impossible until we are in a pressing moment where admitting Jesus would cause us harm.

2. The ease of denying Jesus. Do we see how easy it is to deny Jesus? It is fine to admit loving Jesus to other people who claim to love Jesus. But what about confessing Jesus when it will give us trouble or cause us suffering? We deny Jesus when we refuse to pray in public. We deny Jesus when we will not open a Bible in public. We deny Jesus when we will not admit to being a Christian. We deny Jesus when we refuse to speak out against sinful behaviors. We deny Jesus when there is very little that is distinctive about how I live my life and the lives of those who do not follow Jesus. It is so easy for us to deny Jesus. Do we set our light under a basket so no one can see who we are or see Jesus in us? Or do we set our light on the table, illuminating the whole room so that all see Jesus in our lives?

3. Failure under the world's pressure. The problem with Peter is the same problem we face. When the world presses on us, we cave in. No one wants to be an outsider. No one wants to be an outcast. We do not want to be ridiculed at work because we demand to have our Sundays off so we can worship. We do not want to take flack for telling others to stop their cussing and evil talk while in our presence. We do not want people to criticize us for telling others that sexual immorality is a sin against God. The world is trying to press our values in on us. This is the meaning of Paul's words in Romans 12:2, **"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind..." (Romans 12:2 ESV)** We cannot masquerade as a worldly person. We do not pattern ourselves after the thinking of the world. To be a Christian means to not be like the world in any pattern or fashion.

4. If there is hope for Peter, then there is hope for us. The story is not recorded so that Peter would have his name dragged through the mud or his reputation sullied. The point is that Peter is crushed by

his sin but still finds can come back to Jesus. We know what Peter becomes. Peter comes back stronger in the Lord after his failure. There is hope in the blood of Jesus to come back from the depths of our sins and return to him. For all the damage we do by our sins, our Lord is so gracious that he will take us back though we reject him and deny him. I try to visualize what the look was that Jesus gave as his eyes met Peter's eyes. Surely he did not look at him with hatred or anger. Rather, how often Jesus looked at his creation with compassion. Jesus is going to the cross to deal with our denial. Jesus is going to allow his death to occur so that every sin we make can be overcome.

Let us change how we look at sin. We need to stop simply seeing sin as a breaking of God's law. Can we see our sins as something far worse? Our sin is a denial of who we are to be. Our sin is a denial of our Lord. Our sin is a rejection that God's way is able to provide for my needs and desires. The eyes of the Lord are looking at you. Will you weep bitterly over your sin and turn back to the Lord? Or will you continue to deny the Lord who loves you and died for you?

The interrogation in the house of the high priest is complete. Peter has denied Jesus three times in the middle of the night while Jesus was being interrogated by the high priest. Jesus is now being held over night in the house of the high priest until the morning when the official verdict by the Sanhedrin can occur.

The Mockery (22:63-65)

While Jesus is held over for trial, there are soldiers who are standing guard over him. But it is not an easy time for Jesus. The men who are holding Jesus are mocking him as they beat him. The temple guards are punching him and making fun of him while they do so, with great cruelty. They would cover his eyes, punch him again, and then ask Jesus to prophesy and tell them who was the one who punched him that time. Who hit you that time! "And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him." The other gospel accounts tell us that they are spitting on him while they are abusing him and mocking him. This is what is happening to Jesus as the Sanhedrin waits for the daylight to come so they can pass their verdict.

Jesus predicted these events. Earlier in Luke's gospel we read these words from the mouth of Jesus: **31 And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. 32 For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. 33 And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise."** (Luke 18:31-33 ESV)

The Jewish Trial (22:63-71)

As the sun begins to rise, the Jewish leaders must quickly find charges against Jesus that will be of concern for Pilate. The charge of blasphemy against God is not enough to move Pilate to put Jesus to death. So the circumstances of the interrogation are to get Jesus to say something or admit to something worthy of the death penalty by the Roman government. So the questions go right after Jesus. "If you are the Christ, tell us."

Jesus' response is very simple. "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer." Jesus says that he can make the claim to being the prophesied Christ, the Anointed King of God, but they will not believe it. Further, when Jesus has tried to get the Jewish leaders to answer his questions about who he is, they have repeatedly failed to give an answer. When the leaders asked by what authority Jesus was doing these things, Jesus responded with a question if John's baptism was from heaven or from men (Luke 20:3-8). Jesus would answer them if they would answer his question. They refused to answer his question. A little later in the very same chapter Jesus asked the question how the Christ could be David's son when in speaking about the Christ, David called him "Lord" (Luke 20:41-44). They had no answer for this question either. So Jesus makes the point to the Jewish leadership. You won't believe me if I tell you and when I try to explain myself to you, you refuse to answer my questions. Essentially, this is a pointless trial.

But Jesus does not end it there, like he could have. He does tell the Sanhedrin who he is. Listen to what he says in verse 69, "But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." Jesus makes an enormous statement. We need to understand that only God sits in heaven according to Jewish thinking. So for Jesus to claim to be the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God means only one thing: Jesus is God.

Jesus uses two prophetic texts in his answer to the Sanhedrin. The first text comes from Daniel 7:14 and the second text comes from Psalm 110. Daniel 7 pictures the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days and receiving power, glory, dominion, and a kingdom. This is what it means to sit down at the right hand of God. It is a figure for rule. We see this in the imagery of Psalm 110.

**1 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."
2 The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! (Psalm 110:1-2 ESV)**

The Sanhedrin asks if Jesus is the Anointed One. Jesus answers that there is no point telling you the answer to your question. But he tells them that he will be seated at God's side shortly, ruling from his side. He is the Messiah, the only God. And this is how the Sanhedrin understands Jesus' words.

"Are you the Son of God, then?" That is exactly what Jesus said, but they want Jesus to say the words precisely so as to condemn him to Pilate. They recognize Jesus' claim of divine power. So Jesus gives them a mild affirmation. The NASB reading, "Yes, I am" is too strong and is not the force of Jesus' words. The NKJV inserts the word "rightly" which should not be there. Jesus is not making it easy for the Sanhedrin. Jesus does not deny the charge. And if Jesus is not God this is the very moment to deny the charge and get out of this situation. Jesus does not deny the charge. Rather, he gives a mild affirmation, "You say that I am." Jesus is not going to give the Sanhedrin what they want to hear to make it easy for them to dismiss him and hand him over to Pilate. So the scene is something like this:

Sanhedrin: "Are you the Christ?"

Jesus: "There is no point in answering you. If I tell you, you won't believe and I've tried to explain it before but you would not answer my questions. However, you will see me ruling at the right hand of God as the Messiah King."

Sanhedrin: "So you are God, then?"

Jesus: "You said it."

So this is all they want to hear. They have heard blasphemy from his lips and the claim to be the Messiah King. They will try to have Jesus killed based on his own words.

Pilate's Trial (23:1-5)

The Sanhedrin now escorts Jesus to Pilate. Notice the three charges that the Jewish leaders lay against Jesus. The charge is not blasphemy because that is not relevant to Rome. So here are the charges they have come up with to get Jesus killed by Pilate.

(1) Jesus is misleading our nation. They are suggesting with this accusation that Jesus is disturbing the peace as a religious agitator.

(2) Jesus forbids us to give tribute to Caesar. In our study of Luke we saw that this charge is completely false (Luke 20:25). Jesus actually endorsed paying taxes. But they suggest that Jesus is bringing a financial risk to Rome.

(3) Jesus claims to be anointed, a king. They are suggesting that Jesus is a political threat.

So listen to how they have woven these three charges together. Jesus is a religious threat, a financial threat, and a political threat. Jesus is diverting finances and claiming kingship. Pilate asks Jesus if he is the King of the Jews. Notice that Pilate does not perceive Jesus to be some sort of threat to the Roman Empire. He says, "So you are the King of the Jews?" Jesus' response is once again a mild affirmation and not a denial. "You said it." He is King but he is not out to overthrow Rome in the way that the Jewish leaders are trying to paint Jesus.

So Pilate simply rejects their efforts. He declares to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man." There is nothing that warrants their charges. Jesus is not a threat. He is harmless. The verdict is simply: no guilt in this man. But the Jewish leaders reject this answer. "He stirs up the people,

teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place." They leaders become insistent and try to paint him as a political threat. They picture him as a revolutionary, an insurrectionist. "He's dangerous! He's stirring up the nation!" But Pilate hears the words "from Galilee" and asks if he was a Galilean. Jesus is a Galilean and it turns out that Herod, who rules over Galilee, is in town. So Pilate decides to make Jesus Herod's problem.

Herod's Trial (23:6-12)

It is about a 10 minute walk from the Fortress of Antonia to Herod's palace. Herod is happy to see Jesus because he was wanting to be entertained by Jesus. He has heard about his signs and miracles and he is hoping to see some sign done by Jesus. Jesus is simply a curiosity to Herod. So Herod questions Jesus at length, but Jesus does not give Herod any answer. The chief priest and scribes begin vehemently accusing him, trying to invoke a reaction out of Jesus. Jesus shows great restraint though he is treated like a criminal. Isaiah predicted that this would be the way it would go for God's servant who had come to save the world.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7 ESV)

So the mockery continues. The soldiers treat Jesus with contempt, dress him up like he is a king, and sends him back to Pilate. Pilate apparently appreciated this humor because they became friends from that day forward. So Jesus is back in Pilate's hands and Pilate must do something with this Jesus.

Crucify Him! (23:13-25)

Pilate calls the chief priests and rulers of the Jews. Notice the repeated declared innocence of Jesus. I did not find him guilty and neither did Herod. He has done nothing deserving of death. Therefore, I will punish him and release him. This should be the end of the matter. However, they cry out for Jesus to be sent away to death and for Barabbas to be released. Now here is the irony. Barabbas was actually convicted of being an insurrectionist. The Jewish leaders tried to charge Jesus with being the same, but the verdict was not guilty for Jesus. So they wanted the murderer released to them rather than the Savior. Verse 20 reveals that Pilate is trying to release Jesus, but they keep shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" Once again Pilate declares the innocence of Jesus and will release him. But the mob of people are insistent, demanding with loud cries for his crucifixion. And their voices prevailed. Barabbas the murderer is released. Jesus the Savior is sent away for crucifixion. The condemned is set free.

Luke identified four titles for Jesus in this text: the Christ (22:67), the Son of Man (22:69), the Son of God (22:70), and the King (23:3). The Christ, the Son of God, the King of Israel and of all creation is sent to his death. The condemned is set free. The just for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18).

Who Is Jesus To You?

Is Jesus a mere curiosity like he was for Herod? Do you approach Jesus wanting him to entertain you? Do you approach him because you want him to do something for you, rather than you do something for him? Will you stop seeking what Jesus can do for you and ask what you can do for the one who died for you? He died for you so that you would see Jesus as the Son of God that you must obey and follow.

Is Jesus a threat to your way of living, like he was for the Jewish leaders? Do you reject Jesus because you do not want to accept that believing Jesus means that you must change your life? You do not follow because it means you can't live the way you have been living. Will you change your life for the

one who died for you? He died for you so that you would see Jesus as the Son of God that you must obey and follow.

Is Jesus not worthy of your time like he was for Pilate? Pilate was dismissive of Jesus, believed he was innocent, but simply was not worthy of doing anything about. Will you be more than indifferent toward the one who died for you? He died for you so that you would see Jesus as the Son of God that you must obey and follow.

Most of us don't want changed lives, just changed circumstances. Jesus wants to change your life.

There is no appeals process for the greatest injustice in the history of the world. The person who had never done one thing wrong, morally or otherwise, and lived a perfect life has just been condemned to execution. Every trial exonerated Jesus, yet he is still condemned to go to the cross.

The Walk of Death (23:26-31)

Jesus is led away to walk to the place of his execution. Executions were held outside the city walls. So Jesus takes his walk to his death. But he does not simply walk by himself nor empty-handed. Jesus is carrying the crossbeam for his crucifixion on his shoulders. This was common Roman treatment. Plutarch wrote, "Every criminal who goes to execution must carry his own cross on his back" (The Divine Vengeance, 554 A-B). The condemned would carry the crossbeam to the place where the execution would occur. Scholars have done work on how heavy a cross and crossbeam would be. Studies have shown that carrying a full cross is simply impossible. The weight and mass of that much wood could not be carried by a human. The weight of a full cross would greatly exceed 200 pounds. It is simply too large and too heavy. Most of the paintings of medieval and renaissance times depicts Jesus carrying a whole cross, dragging some of it on the ground. Movies have also depicted this. But it is too much for a human to carry. However, carrying the crossbeam is manageable. It is heavy, but it is possible. Verse 26 reveals that Jesus is unable to carry his cross because a random person is selected to carry the crossbeam for Jesus to the place of execution. Simon of Cyrene is chosen by the Romans. This inability to carry his crossbeam reveals the degree of punishment Jesus has endured up to this point. He should have been able to carry his cross, but he cannot. The condemned carried their crosses. The only logical explanation left is that the punishment Jesus endured, from the beatings to the floggings, has significantly impacted the flesh of Jesus. So Simon is carrying the cross of Jesus.

We are also told that Jesus is not walking by himself. Verse 27 tells that there was a great crowd of people following Jesus. Further there was a group of women following, mourning and lamenting for him. But Jesus turns to them and tells them to not weep for him, but to weep for themselves. There is a judgment that is coming against Israel for this action. Jesus prophesied about all of this and how the doom of Israel was coming for killing him.

13 Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' 14 But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' 15 And 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 destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." (Luke 20:13–16 ESV)

Matthew tells a parable the wedding feast that is rejected by those invited. Listen to his description of what God will do: **The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. (Matthew 22:7 ESV)**

So Jesus warns again about what is coming about the nation because of what they are doing. Verse 29 reveals that the situation will become so bad that blessings and curses will be reversed. Having children was considered the greatest blessing a Jewish woman could have. The blessed people will be those who never had children. People will cry to the mountains to fall on them, a picture that comes from Hosea 10:8. They will be begging for protection and help, but there will be no help. Jesus tells a short parable in verse 31. If everything goes bad when things are good, what will happen to you when things turn bad? God is going to act because of this great injustice.

Crucified (23:32-34)

Luke tells that Jesus is not alone in execution either. There are two others who are marching to the place of crucifixion as well. They are criminals and they are apparently deserving of death. They are carrying their crosses to the place of execution. I want us to see that it was not by accident that Jesus used this image to speak of discipleship.

And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (Luke 9:23 ESV)

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:27 ESV)

To follow Jesus means to put yourself to death. This is a metaphor for killing our desires, passions, comforts, and decisions. Now Jesus will be our life. Now our decisions and desires are built only upon what Jesus wants us to do, not what we want to do. To follow Jesus the cross must be carried.

In verse 33 the death march is complete. They come to the place that is called The Skull. In Hebrew/ Aramaic the name is Golgotha. In Latin this place is called Calvary. When we sing songs about Calvary or Golgotha, we are singing about the place of crucifixion just outside the city walls of Jerusalem, which means The Skull. The Romans liked to crucify people on higher ground along a busy road so that those walking along the road could see what happens to those who go against the Romans. Verse 33 declares the act with such simple and concise words: "There they crucified him, and the criminals." This is when the nails were driven into the hands and feet. Some crucifixions were not done with nails but were done with ropes. The reason we know that nails were used for Jesus because when Jesus raises from the dead, Jesus proves that he is alive by showing his hands and feet (Luke 24:40). Therefore, nails were used in Jesus' hands and feet to hold him on the cross. Thomas' words are even clearer:

"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." (John 20:25 ESV)

The scriptures are clear that nails were used. Studies as well as archaeology has shown that the nails would have been driven into wrist so that the body would be able to hold the body weight of the victim on the cross. It would be very difficult for palms to hold the weight of the body upright on the cross. Nails were also driven into the sides of each ankle, to affix the feet to each side of the post of the cross. Luke simply says that Jesus was crucified, and all the readers in the first century knew the horror of what these sickening words meant. It is at this moment that Jesus says something shocking.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34 ESV)

In these words we see the heart of our merciful Lord. Jesus is still acting as our intercessor, even while nails are being driven into his body and he is being hung on the wood of that cross. Intercession, when God's wrath should have fallen. Jesus does not show vindictiveness. Love for people is seen from the cross. Jesus is doing the very thing he taught his followers to do. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). So Jesus does what he taught and prays for those who are killing him. We must never think that we cannot pray for our enemies and forgive those who seek it, no matter how awful they have acted. Jesus is praying for people who are killing him. The disciple Steven, following the example of Jesus, did the exact same thing in Acts 7 as he prayed for those who were killing him. Pray for your enemies. Pray for your persecutors.

Finally, it was customary for the Roman soldiers to cast lot for the victim's clothing. This occurs for Jesus, which fulfills the prophecy recorded in Psalm 22:18.

Cascading Mockery (23:35-39)

Now the mockery begins to intensify. The people are watching but the Jewish rulers are scoffing at Jesus. "If you are God's elect, then certainly God will save you!" Basically, the rulers are saying that if you

are who you say you are, then God will save you. Or to put it another way, you cannot be who you say you are because we are killing you. You must not be the prophesied Messiah. And so they mock him, "He saved others; let him save himself." Yet their actions are fulfilling prophecy made about what would happen to the Messiah.

All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" (Psalm 22:7-8 ESV)

Everyone is mocking Jesus. No one is defending him. It is a world of mockery against Jesus. "He saved others; let him save himself." So the rulers are mocking him mercilessly. Then Luke records that the Roman soldiers are also mocking Jesus. They bring sour wine to Jesus. The wine is not sympathetic but to make the suffering last longer. The Romans did not consider this drink to be intoxicating but to give more strength so that the suffering on that cross would last longer. They also join in the mocking. "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" Some king you are if you cannot save yourself! No bona fide king would endure this. The sign above him is a mockery: The King of the Jews. Even one of the criminals is joining in on the mockery. "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" People are watching. The rulers are mocking. The soldiers are ridiculing. A crucified criminal even yells insults at him. Other gospel accounts tell us that random people walking down the road hurled insults at him also.

Everyone fails to understand something about what Jesus was doing. Jesus saved others because he did not save himself. His death is our forgiveness. Jesus is able to save others and himself, but chooses not to save himself.

The Salvation of the Condemned (23:40-43)

But something else amazing happens. The other criminal crucified with them rebukes the mocking crucified criminal. He declares that he and the other criminal are dying justly for their actions. But notice the words, a key emphasis in Luke's gospel: "But this man has done nothing wrong." The innocence of Jesus is declared again. Then the criminal makes an appeal to Jesus, asking to be remembered when Jesus comes into his kingdom. Listen to what Jesus says in response: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Jesus predicts that no one is going to make it past today. Paradise was considered in Judaism as the abode of the righteous. Salvation is today. Today you will be with me, with the innocent in Paradise.

A shocking answer! How can the condemned guilty criminal be with the perfect Lamb of God in Paradise? How can this person, deserving of death, be given the hope that he will be the innocent Son of God? How can Jesus tell this criminal essentially, "Where I am going, you are going too?" This is picture of the amazing grace of God! Undeserved grace to the sinful! We are saved just as this criminal on the cross was saved. Let me explain how.

One of my books said this: "Jesus saved this man immediately, eternally, personally, and also graciously - by faith, apart from any works." But I want to submit to you that this is not true. Friends, what separated this criminal that will go to Paradise from the one who was mocking Jesus? Or to ask the question another way: Why did Jesus declare salvation to one criminal and not the other? What differentiated these two criminals? It is not their crimes. It is not one mocked and other didn't, since Matthew records that both the criminals were mocking him for a time. What was the difference? The answer is that the criminal **asked** Jesus to be part of kingdom. One criminal asked for salvation and the other did not. One criminal had faith in Jesus and the other did not. One criminal made his appeal to the Lord Jesus for Jesus to do something for him and the other did not. Do not declare that this criminal did absolutely nothing. The criminal made an appeal of faith to the Lord. After that appeal was made, the Lord Jesus gave him the promise that he would be with Jesus in Paradise.

Friends, we are saved in the exact same way. In fact, every person in all history was saved in the same way: making an appeal to God for forgiveness and salvation. This is what you are doing when you confess Jesus as the Son of God, repent of your sins, and are immersed in water. You are making your appeal to God to be with him in Paradise. You are asking him to have your sins removed because we are vile sinners just like this criminal. All that we have is to beg for Jesus to cleanse us from our sins and remember us in his kingdom.

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (1 Peter 3:21–22 ESV)

Baptism is the asking process. There is nothing special about the water. There is nothing special about you. You are simply acting like the criminal on the cross, asking the Lord, appealing to him through the resurrection of Jesus, for a good conscience. The God's Word translation takes the word "appeal" and translates it as "request" which is also accurate.

Rather, baptism is a request to God for a clear conscience. It saves you through Jesus Christ, who came back from death to life. (1 Peter 3:21 God's Word)

Jesus saves immediately, eternally, personally, and graciously by faith. All we have to do is ask. He did not save himself so you could be saved.

Jesus is hanging on the cross. He has prayed to the Father that they be forgiven because they do not know what they are doing. We noticed in our last lesson how amazing it is to see our Lord still acting as an intercessor for the people, during his greatest suffering, and praying for those who had caused this suffering. Jesus has been enduring a cascade of mockery for six hours while on the cross, not counting the mocking that occurred during his trials before the Sanhedrin and before Herod. Jesus has told one of the criminals, who made this appeal to the Lord Jesus for entrance into his kingdom, that he would be with Jesus in Paradise this day.

Darkness (23:44-45)

Luke now records for us that Jesus has been on the cross for about three hours and at noon there was darkness over the land. The sun's light failed. I would like for you to try to imagine what that looked like. Suddenly, when the sun should be high in the sky, the light from the sun fails. The word translated "failed" in the ESV means "to fail, to give out, to die out." The sun did not have an eclipse. The sun was not darkened, blocked, or obscured. The light from the sun quit, is what Luke writes. Luke has used the Greek word *ekleipo* in two other places.

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. (Luke 16:9 ESV)

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31-32 ESV)

We do not know how widespread the darkness was. The word translated "land" can also mean "earth." So we do not know if this was only in Jerusalem, or over all of Israel, the Mediterranean, or the whole earth. What we do know is that God was behind this act. Darkness represents the judgment of God in Old Testament prophecy (Zephaniah 1:14-15; Joel 2:2; Amos 5:20; 8:9-10). Listen to Amos predicted the doom on the nation of Israel for its sins.

"And on that day," declares the Lord GOD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day." (Amos 8:9-10 ESV)

Amos was not prophesying about the day Jesus would be crucified. But the prophetic imagery is powerful. The darkness imagery represents the judgment of God for the nation's sins. God is watching what is happening to the Son of God. God makes the sun's light fail at midday to decree judgment.

Too often people have read this darkness as a severing of fellowship between the Father and the Son. There is nothing in the gospel accounts that tell us this. In fact, Jesus declared that the Father would not leave him.

Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. (John 16:32 ESV)

Jesus said that the Father was with him even when his disciples had turned away. The darkness does not represent God's judgment falling on Jesus. I do not know where we picked up this idea but it is not found in the scriptures. The darkness represents God's judgment falling on Israel. That is what the darkness at noon represented in Amos's prophecy and it means the same thing here. God is not showing his displeasure with the Son, but the with the nation of Israel. The crucifixion of the Son of God is the final straw as the darkness pronounces the doom of the nation.

Temple Curtain Torn (23:45)

Another amazing event is also happening according to Luke's gospel. The curtain of the temple was torn in two during the Passover preparations. Josephus tells us that the curtain that separated the inner sanctuary (the Holy of Holies) from the Holy Place was 30 feet wide and 30 feet high. This is an enormous curtain of thick material. The symbolism of the torn curtain is immense. The Holy of Holies was a small room in the temple where the presence of God was pictured as dwelling. It was the room where atonement could be made once a year for the sins of the people. No one was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies ever with one exception. One time each year on the day of atonement, the high priest entered that room with the blood of animals and made atonement for the people. Listen to how the writer of Hebrews pictures the work of Jesus from the cross in the Holy Place.

11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Hebrews 9:11–14 ESV)

Now Jesus has come as our high priest and he entered the holy places with his own blood, securing our atonement. His death brings about our eternal redemption. The tearing of the temple's curtain represents how everyone has access to the presence of God and the end of the temple's role in atonement. Now Jesus is where purification and atonement comes from. This event made an amazing mark on the priests. Luke records in the book of Acts that "a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). They saw something amazing and the gospel message explained to them what the tearing of the curtain meant.

The Righteous Sufferer (23:47-49)

Then Luke records the final words of Jesus. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" After saying these words, Jesus died. These are not empty words, but are a quotation from Psalm 31:5. Psalm 31 is the prayer of the righteous sufferer in the hands of his enemies calling for deliverance. The one who says these words is placing his fate in the hands of God. Jesus becomes the model for how to suffer for righteousness. As life is leaving his body, he declares that his fate is in God's hands and he is trusting God for the very thing Jesus has predicted — resurrection. He entrusts himself to God who will raise him from the dead.

When the centurion, which is a Roman soldier, saw what had taken place, he praised God. This is the goal of our lives. How we endure, how we suffer, and how we entrust ourselves in the hands of God is for the purpose of others praising and glorifying God. It happens at this moment. The centurion praises God and declares the innocence of Jesus (a key theme in Luke's record). Jesus is innocent of all crimes and sins. Therefore God will be faithful to him and deliver him from the bars of death.

The crowd of witnesses also have a powerful reaction. They return home, beating their breasts. This is not a routine response to death. This crowd has also been moved by the events they have witnessed. The acquaintances and women who followed Jesus seem to stand in shock, watching from a distance. It is over. Jesus has died. There was no deliverance. There was no miraculous intervention. The horror show has finally ended. Now Jesus' body hangs limp on the cross.

The Burial (23:50-56)

A man named Joseph who is from the Jewish town of Arimathea was also there. We are told that he was a member of the Sanhedrin council, the council that had held a false trial and condemned Jesus to be handed to Pilate for execution. Surprisingly, he is not like those council members. Luke tells us that he was a good and righteous man and had not consented to the Sanhedrin's decision to hand Jesus over to Pilate for execution. Luke says something that ought to ring a bell for us who have studied through this gospel. Joseph was looking for the kingdom of God. We were told about a man named Simeon who "was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25). We read about a prophetess named Anna who was telling "all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" about the birth of Jesus. There are righteous people who were looking forward and waiting for the Messiah and his kingdom. Joseph of Arimathea is one of those people. John's gospel tells us that Joseph was a disciple of Jesus.

Joseph builds up his courage to go to Pilate (Mark 15:43) and asks for the privilege of obeying the scriptures. I find it interesting to say the least that the brothers of Jesus do not come to take the body, which was customary. The family would take the body. Rather, someone we have not heard about in the scriptures up to this point, asks to take the body of Jesus. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 taught that anyone who is hung on a tree must not be left on that tree after death. He must be buried that same day. So Joseph takes it upon himself to obey the command of the scriptures and asks for the body of Jesus from Pilate. I would like for you to think about being Joseph as he does what verse 53 records. He took down the body of Jesus from the cross. The Romans would have left the body up there to be picked apart by the birds. Joseph takes down the body of Jesus, wraps the body in a linen cloth, and laid his body in a tomb cut in stone. Being laid in an unused tomb of a rich man is a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 53:9).

It is the Day of Preparation, which means it is the day before the Passover feast begins. It is the day to get all your preparations made before you had to Sabbath for the Passover. Luke tells us that Joseph has to hurry because the Sabbath was beginning. It is nearly 6pm when the new day started to the Jewish calculation. So Joseph must bury Jesus in his tomb before the next day began and they had to Sabbath according to the Law of Moses. The women are watching every move of Joseph. They are watching Joseph place Jesus in his tomb. They followed Joseph to the tomb and saw where and how he was laid in that tomb. We know why they are pay so close attention. When the Passover feast is done they plan to come back and place spices and perfumes on his body. So they watch where the body is laid, go home to prepare their spices, and have everything ready so that when their commanded rest is completed, they can immediately go back to the tomb and finish putting spices on his body. We clearly see that resurrection was not expected. They all just want a proper, honorable burial. They are preparing spices because they are expecting the body to decay. That is why they would put a hundred pounds of spices on the body. It was to help deal with the stink of the decaying body in the tomb. Decay is expected, not resurrection.

Conclusion

What do all of these events mean for us? The writer of Hebrews explains:

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:19-20 ESV)

We have hope as an anchor for our lives because Jesus has torn the curtain so that we can enter into the inner place of the temple. Jesus has led the way so that we can access our Father. The writer expands on this a little later in his treatise:

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19–22 ESV)

Jesus has opened the curtain that separated us from the presence of God. Jesus opened the curtain by his flesh and his our great high priest so that we can confidently enter the holy places. Jesus on the cross made it so we could have access to the Father. Therefore, there is no other way to come to the Father except through Jesus. The new way to the Father opened to us is through the flesh of Jesus acting as our high priest. But you cannot just walk in. You must walk in with a sincere heart. You must walk in full of faith. You must walk in with your hearts sprinkled clean. You must walk in with bodies cleansed with pure water. When you enter, you are given an assured hope that God will raise you up, just as Jesus was raised up from the dead.

The Third Day
Luke 24:1-12

Joseph of Arimathea received permission to take down the body of Jesus from the cross. He has transported the body of Jesus to his tomb, an unused tomb. The women who were followers of Jesus and had come from Galilee watched where Joseph put the body and went home to prepare spices for the body of Jesus. The preparation of the spices is in expectation of decay. The body quickly begins to decay and so pounds of spices were brought to deal with the smell of the body while making preparations for the body. Joseph has wrapped the body in a linen shroud and closed the tomb. The Jewish leaders have requested a guard be placed around the tomb to ensure that no one would be able to steal the body. Luke 23:56 tells us that everyone had gone back to their homes, observed the Passover, and observed the Sabbath.

Risen (24:1-12)

Now it is the first day of the week, the first day after the Sabbath. The day is just like any other day. There is no expectation for anything amazing today. It is early dawn. The sun is beginning to ever so slightly shed its early light. The women gather and start walking to the tomb where Jesus' body was laid. They go with the spices they had prepared before the Sabbath occurred. They have been waiting with anticipation to go back to the tomb and finish with the honorable burial of their Savior. As they approach the tomb, they discover something unusual. The stone that covered the tomb had been rolled away. The tomb was no longer sealed. But maybe Joseph has also come back early this morning to do some final preparations also. But that is not the answer. The women come to the tomb, go inside the tomb, and do not see the body of Jesus. The linen clothes remain, but the body is not there. Verse 4 tells us that women are perplexed by this scene. What happened to the body of Jesus? No one is expecting a resurrection. Notice that no one says that Jesus must have raised from the dead. Rather, the only response we see in the gospel accounts is that it was believed that the body had been moved. No one thought that the answer to the empty tomb was resurrection. The followers of Jesus did not expect the body of Jesus to be missing.

Verse 3 is very important to our understanding of this event. Luke emphasizes that they did not find the body of Jesus. What we are reading about is not a spiritual resurrection and Luke wants us to clearly know this. It is the body of Jesus that has come back to life. He is not a ghost. He is not a figment of imagination. This is life in the body. This is why Jesus could tell people to see his hands and his feet. The physical body of Jesus is not there any longer.

While the women are trying to figure out what they are looking at and where the body of Jesus is, there are two men in dazzling apparel. The clothing tells us that they are angels, as well as the other gospel accounts. They see these two angels and fall down in fear to the ground. But they angels ask an important question: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" The angels seem to be perplexed by the women. Why have you come to the tomb? Why would look for someone who is alive by looking in a tomb? He is not here but has risen. God's plan has not been derailed! In fact, Jesus told you that this was going to happen. Don't you remember? In Luke 9:22 Jesus taught his disciples:

"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (Luke 9:22 ESV)

Remember how he told you that he would be raised from the dead on the third day? Verse 8 tells us that they remembered Jesus' words. "That is right! Jesus did say he would be raised from the dead!"

Why The Third Day?

Have you ever asked the question why Jesus had to rise on the third day? Why not the next day? Why not on the fourth day? Or in a week? What is the significance of Jesus rising on the third day? There are two key points to the resurrection occurring on the third day.

To the Jewish way of thinking, decay began on the body after three days. It was after three days that the visible outward signs of decomposition became apparent, making the deceased unrecognizable. Notice these Jewish ideas about death:

"After three days in the grave a person's belly bursts open and erupts from the mouth and says to the person, 'Here is what you stole, grabbed, and put in me!'" (Leviticus Rabbah 18:1). In our scientific terms we call this the bloat stage where the gases which have built up in the body push out of the body's orifices the liquids and liquifying tissues of the body.

"For the first three days after death, the soul hovers over the body, thinking that it will return to it. When it sees that the appearance of the corpse deteriorates, it leaves the body and goes its way." (Jerusalem Talmud; Moed Qatan 3:5). Here again is the belief that decay begins after the third day.

It was after the third day that decay began on the body in the Jewish mind. The third day was important because of this prophecy:

"Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay." (Psalm 16:9–10 NIV)

The Messiah would not see decay, which is this passage that Peter quotes in his first sermon explaining the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:27). Jesus would rise on the third day so that his body would not see decay or corruption. But, why not rise on the next day or the second day? This explains why not the fourth day or in a week. But why not one day later?

The second key to the third day is that the third day was the day of salvation. Listen to the scriptures and notice how the third day is the day of salvation.

"Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. (Hosea 6:1–2 ESV)

And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. (Jonah 1:17 ESV)

1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. (Genesis 22:1–4 ESV)

When Esther inquires before the king to deliver her people from execution, it is on the third day that she goes before the king (Esther 5:1). Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac on the third day (Genesis 22:4). God came down to Mount Sinai on the third day (Exodus 19:11,16). David was delivered from the hand of Saul on the third day (2 Samuel 1:2). The Lord healed Hezekiah of his illness and raised up Hezekiah on the third day (2 Kings 20:5). The third day is the day of deliverance. The third day is the day of salvation. The third day is a declaration by our Lord that not only will God deliver him from death, but that salvation will be offered to the world through this resurrection. The third day stands as hope for salvation. When Jesus is going around telling his disciples that he will be raised on the third day, there was a scriptural clue that deliverance and salvation was coming to the world on this third day.

Conclusion

We need to see a title that Luke gives for the very first time in this gospel, recorded in verse 3. Notice that Luke does not say that they did not find the body of Jesus. Notice the title: Lord Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus is the declaration of the lordship of Jesus. The scriptures reveal that God declared Jesus to be Lord by raising him from the dead.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.... (Romans 1:1–4 ESV)

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, 35 until I make your enemies your footstool." 36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:33–36 ESV)

The resurrection is the ultimate declaration of who Jesus is. Jesus was not just a man. Jesus was not just a good teacher. Jesus is not just someone who had some good ideas. Jesus was shown and declared by the resurrection to be both the Lord God, Creator and Ruler over all, and Christ, the promised King, Savior, and Deliverer of the world. If Jesus did not raise from the dead, then he is not the Lord and he is not Savior and King. His teachings are lies and he is a liar. Christianity stands or falls on the risen body of Jesus.

Not only does the resurrection declare Jesus to be the Lord and Christ, but it also makes a declaration for us.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3–5 ESV)

Notice that we have experienced a new birth, radical life change by his great mercy, into a living hope. Peter says we have hope and have been born again through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus has caused us to have hope. How does the resurrection of Jesus give us hope? Consider what Jesus said while on the cross, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). We noted that this was a quotation from Psalm 31:5 and is the declaration of the a righteous sufferer who is succumbing to the hands of his enemies praying for deliverance. The resurrection shows that Jesus was right to entrust himself to God's hands because God kept his promise and by his power raised Jesus from the dead. That resurrection from the dead has implication to our lives. The resurrection shows the power of God and that he keeps his promises. When God says something, he does it and he has the power to do anything he does say.

So what is our living hope? The resurrection proves we have new life and are not condemned in our sins through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Further, our living hope is that we have an inheritance that is kept in heaven for us by the power of God awaiting to be revealed in the last time. The resurrection of Jesus proves that he will also raise you from the dead and bring you to your inheritance that is reserved in heaven for you. The resurrection of Jesus is the declaration to you that it is not over when you die, that you will be raised by the power of God from the dead, and receive the

reward kept in heaven for you, to those who have been born again. This is the hope we live for. This is the glorious hope we have in Jesus. Paul wrote to the Romans, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Romans 6:5). His resurrection is our hope.

It is the first day of the week. The women have found the tomb where Jesus' body was laid to be empty. The angels have declared that Jesus is alive. Peter and John have run to the tomb and found the same evidence. But Luke takes us away from the tomb and tells us about a resurrection appearance that is not recorded in any of the other gospels. Luke tells us about two men who are walking a seven mile journey from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus. Who are these two men that the scripture would record that it was "two of them?" The connection goes back to verse 9 that these two men were followers of Jesus. Verse 22 confirms this as they say that "some women of our company amazed us" because they saw the empty tomb. These two men are disciples of Jesus. As these two men walk they are discussing all the things that had happened the last three days. The person they had followed had just been betrayed by Judas, handed over by the Jewish authorities, killed by the Romans, and the women are telling people that the body is missing. There is a lot for them to discuss. As they are walking on the road, Jesus starts walking with them. However, their eyes are kept from recognizing that this person is Jesus. Rather than just appearing to them, Jesus seems to want to have a discussion with them first before revealing himself.

Have you ever asked the question or heard others ask, "Why doesn't God just reveal himself to everyone? If he wants followers and believers, then why doesn't God just show himself?" I believe the answer to that question is found in these resurrection appearances. As we read this discussion between Jesus and these two disciples, ask yourself why Jesus is concealing himself from these two men. What is Jesus trying to accomplish? Why not just show himself to them?

The Discussion (24:17-27)

So Jesus walks up to them and asks what they are talking about. Notice that the two men stop walking and look sad. These two men are filled with grief. Jesus is dead and they do not know what to make of what the women are saying. But they are not accepting the answer of resurrection. They are grieving over the loss of their teacher. Imagine if you had lost your loved one and about three days later someone comes up to you and asks you what is going on in your life! The pain of what had transpired comes rushing right back over you again. So one of the men says, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" Everyone knows what has happened this weekend. Even people who were visitors in the city heard about this. Are you the only visitor of Jerusalem who has no idea what just happened? So Jesus says, "What things?" It is not like Jesus does not know. He wants to hear their discussion and see what answers they are coming up with for what they have just seen and heard about Jesus.

So the men recount the story of Jesus. Jesus was a man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and in word before God and all the people. But the chief priests delivered him up to be crucified. We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. He was the one we had hoped to be our Messiah, Savior, and Deliverer. This hope is the same hope expressed by Zechariah in Luke 1:68-79. Besides all of these things, it is the third day since all these things had happened. The women went to the tomb in the morning and did not find his body. They saw angels and the angels told the women that Jesus was alive. Some of the disciples went to the tomb to see for themselves and found the tomb just like the women said. The body was not there.

Now, again, Jesus does not reveal himself and make everything okay. Nor does he reveal himself and then rebuke them. Here is this stranger that to these men has no idea what has happened in Jerusalem these past three days. This stranger turns on them and says, "**O foolish ones, and slow of**

heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Notice that Jesus does not criticize them for being slow to believe the testimony of the women or the testimony of the disciples who went to the tomb and found it empty. They are criticized for not believing what the prophets had spoken! Instead of saying, "Look at me and believe," Jesus calls them foolish and unwilling to believe the scriptures. All the prophets spoke of this event. The prophets declare that the Christ would suffer and then enter glory. How can you not believe when the scriptures spoke of all of this? Passages like Psalm 118, Isaiah 53, Psalm 31, Psalm 69, Psalm 22 and many others speak about these events. Judaism did not have an expectation of a suffering Messiah, but the prophets did.

Then notice what Jesus does. **"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."** (Luke 24:27 ESV) To say "Moses and the Prophets" is the same as saying "The Law and the Prophets." "Moses and the prophets" was a traditional way to speak of all of the Hebrew scriptures. Jesus went through the entire scriptures, from front to back, and interpreted all the things concerning himself. What Jesus is doing is showing that all of the scriptures were about him. All of the scriptures were pointing toward the Christ. The scriptures teach us about Jesus, and that does not mean the New Testament. There was not a New Testament yet when Jesus explained the scriptures concerning himself. Moses and prophets are foretelling and foreshadowing the coming of Christ. Consider this: here is the risen Jesus and rather than revealing himself to them, he reveals the scriptures to them to prove his resurrection.

The New Testament authors and teachers did the same thing.

24 A Jew named Apollos, a native Alexandrian, an eloquent man who was powerful in the use of the Scriptures, arrived in Ephesus. 28 For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating through the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah. (Acts 18:24, 28 HCSB) Apollos demonstrated Jesus is the Messiah from the scriptures. Again, these scriptures are what we would call "the Old Testament." But what about the apostles? Surely they just went around saying that they saw Jesus.

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." (Acts 17:2-3 ESV) The apostle Paul does not merely say, "I saw him!" He said, "Read your Bibles!"

How dare anyone ever say that the Hebrew scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, is irrelevant, not applicable to us, or worse, boring! Not only must we never say or think something like this because these are God's holy words, but also because these words speak about Jesus. These words proved Jesus to be the Christ. These words foretold and foreshadowed God's plan in Christ for the world. To be bored with reading Leviticus or studying Zephaniah only shows we have missed everything in the scriptures. We have missed Jesus in the scriptures. We have not seen him in God's word. Jesus showed these two disciples that you can find him in the Law and the Prophets.

Now, let us get to the heart of the matter. The scriptures are not about you or me. Too often I have heard people declare that the scriptures are about us. The scriptures are not about us. They are all about the Christ. The scriptures are preparing the world from the Christ to come. The scriptures are foreshadowing what the Christ will do when he arrives. The scriptures teach what kind of people the Christ will have for his followers. The scriptures teach the need for salvation and forgiveness that only comes through Christ. The scriptures are all about the Christ. Jesus is the Christ. We do not read the scriptures to find out God's plan for us. We read the scriptures to find out how we can fit into God's plan.

Let's go back to the question we had at the start of the lesson. Why does Jesus do this? Why doesn't Jesus just appear to these men? Faith is to be built, not on seeing Jesus, but the scriptures. These two

disciples had not seen the risen Jesus when Jesus told them that they were slow to believe and foolish. We are foolish if we think we need God to reveal himself directly to us to have faith. Our Lord wants to see if we will have faith in him because he has given us all that we need. He does not need to appear to every person. Remember in Luke 16 when the rich man who was in Hades asked Abraham to send Lazarus back to his five brothers so that they would not come to this place. What did Abraham answer the rich man? **"They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them hear them" (Luke 16:29)**. The scriptures are sufficient. Not only are they sufficient, they are better than a resurrection appearance. The rich man argues that if someone from the dead goes to them then they will repent. Listen to Abraham again: **"If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31)**. God wants faith in him. That faith is supposed to come from the scriptures. In fact, if they won't believe the scriptures, then they will not believe even if God showed himself to every single person. We have a hard time with that thought, but we know it is true. When Lazarus was raised from the dead, some people tried to kill him. God showed himself through Jesus for years and yet thousands of people rejected him. If the scriptures will not convince you, then nothing will.

Jesus Revealed (24:28-35)

Returning to the story, Jesus and the two disciples arrive at Emmaus. But Jesus acted like he was going on. So the two disciples urged Jesus to stay with them. So Jesus went into their home and ate and drank with them. Please notice that he ate and drank like a normal human. There is nothing unusual about this risen body of Jesus. They think they are keeping this stranger in their home for the night. But then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Jesus wanted their faith to be grounded in the scriptures, not on his appearance. Once their faith was rooted in God's word, he revealed himself to them and then vanished. Now they look back at the past few hours as they had walked with Jesus. Jesus had opened the scriptures to them and their hearts had burned within them. This is a beautiful image. I do not believe this is describing something supernatural. This is what is supposed to happen when our hearts are open to receive God's word. The exposition of the scriptures is to cause our hearts to be moved and our minds to comprehend the will and love of God. There is excitement in hearing the word of the Lord expounded upon and explained. So the two men leave that hour and go back to Jerusalem. They find the apostles and the other disciples gathered. The group tells these two men that Jesus has indeed risen and has also appeared to Simon, who we know as Peter. Then the two men tell the group all that had happened to them. They did not need to hear that Jesus had appeared to Simon. The Lord Jesus had already appeared to them in the scriptures. And their hearts burned from the faith and knowledge of God's powerful word.

Conclusion

Jesus speaks to me everyday. Does he speak to you everyday? Are our hearts and minds moved as we read and examine God's holy words? What a blessing that Jesus speaks to you and me every day when we pick up these scriptures and read them. These are the powerful words of God that we hold in these Bibles. These words are the basis for your faith. Your faith will be great if you will let Jesus teach you from his scriptures. The scriptures are all about Jesus. Will you be all about getting to know Jesus? Long for the pure, spiritual milk of the word so that you may grow by it (1 Peter 2:2).

How do you end a gospel? Luke began this gospel writing to Theophilus an orderly account concerning the life of Jesus. Particularly, Luke wants Theophilus to “have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” Luke has recounted for all the world to read that Jesus has risen from the dead. There are two final teaching points for Luke as he concludes his account of the good news: (1) declare the resurrection and (2) instruct what to do because of the resurrection.

Declaring the Resurrection (24:36-43)

Verse 36 begins, “As they were talking about these things.” This refers to what we studied in our last lesson. The two disciples who had gone to Emmaus and seen the risen Lord had returned to Jerusalem to tell the disciples there all that had happened. The disciples declare that the risen Jesus had appeared to Peter and the two men from Emmaus describe seeing the risen Jesus also. So while the disciples are talking to each other about these resurrection appearance, Jesus stands among them and says, “Peace to you!” This is startling and frightening to have Jesus, who was laying dead in a tomb yesterday, standing suddenly among the group of disciples. They think they are just seeing a spirit and not the risen Jesus. Resurrection from the dead is hard to believe. It requires belief in a miracle. Again I want us to see that there are no disciples who are expecting resurrection. No one is like, “I totally expected this to happen.” This is important for the notion that people have these days that the disciples so badly wanted to believe that Jesus rose from the dead that they thought they saw him, but actually did not. No one was expecting Jesus to be alive. Listen to the words of Jesus which proves the mental state of the disciples. “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” They are not immediately believing. They are skeptical. They are so skeptical that they do not believe they are seeing the risen Jesus, but just his spirit.

Jesus does two things to confirm to the disciples what they are seeing. First, he tells the disciples to touch him. A spirit does not have flesh and bones. This is not a spiritual resurrection. This is not a spirit. The disciples are not looking at an apparition or mystical vapor. It is not even a new body. They recognize it is Jesus by looking at him. Further, Jesus instructs them to examine his hands and feet, for this would have wounds from the nails that were driven into those body parts. Second, Jesus eats broiled fish with them. This is a second proof to the disciples that this is the physical resurrection of Jesus. When Peter is preaching to Cornelius and his household, he told them how they ate and drank with the risen Jesus. Jesus has risen from the dead. Now what does this mean for the world?

What The Resurrection Means For Us (24:44-53)

Jesus now tells the disciples what we learned in our last lesson. The scriptures were all about Jesus. Everything from Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then Jesus opens their minds to understand the scriptures. John’s gospel records that Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). These seem to be parallel accounts. Jesus is giving the disciples what was promised in John 14-17 to understand the scriptures. This should caution us against suggesting that the disciples are mistaken in their question to Jesus 40 days later in Acts 1:6 regarding restoring the kingdom to Israel. Jesus has opened their minds to understand the scriptures. They are no longer the disciples that do not understand the scriptures. Once Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples understood Jesus’ teachings and the scriptures that pointed spoke of him. Now what? Jesus is proven to have been risen from the dead, not simply because of these witnesses, but because the scriptures all spoke of these

things. Is it enough to simply believe that Jesus rose from the dead and do nothing else? Jesus now instructs his disciples further.

“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:46–47 ESV)

Now that Jesus has risen from the dead according to the scriptures, repentance and forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed through Jesus to all the nations. The mission was going to start in Jerusalem, which is what the prophets foretold (cf. Isaiah 2:3). “For out of Zion shall go the teaching, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:3) So they are told to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father. Then they will be clothed with power from on high. We see this coming to fruition in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit falls upon the apostles. This was the sign to the nation that the restoration of the kingdom promises had arrived.

Disciples of Jesus go and proclaim Jesus everywhere. It is this directive that we read being fulfilled in Luke’s sequel work, the book of Acts in our scriptures. The book of Acts begins where this gospel ends, with the disciples being taught by Jesus after the resurrection and waiting for the Holy Spirit to come with power upon them in Jerusalem. The book of Acts records the disciples of Jesus going out into the world proclaiming Jesus to all people. But the book of Acts ends in a seemingly strange way. It does not have an ending. It just seems to suddenly stop with Paul in Rome. The reason is that the mission is not finished with the apostles. The mission was not completed in the first century.

We learn that evangelism is not for the few. Evangelism is not for a particular department or group within the church. Evangelism is not something that is hired out. Evangelism is not an outreach project. Evangelism is not in hanging banners or advertising through mailers and newspapers. Evangelism is the natural response for receiving forgiveness of sins through our risen Savior. We are proclaiming to people that forgiveness of sins is available because Jesus rose from the dead. The scriptures have no concept of a Christian who does not share the message of forgiveness of sins.

What is your Acts 29 chapter? The problem is that we often think of the mission in terms of large outreach projects. We think of the mission in terms of sending ministers to other countries to preach the gospel. We think of the mission often only in terms of missionaries. Too often we think of the mission as something done outside of ourselves. But what do we see in the scriptures?

1 And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. (Acts 8:1,4 ESV)

This is what the mission looks like. Wherever you are and wherever you go, share the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins through the risen Jesus. This is your Acts 29. What will you write as your chapter? How will you share this message to the people you know? **Illustration:** When I was in Minneapolis with Andy Cantrell last year, we were talking about the work that we do. It was useful to be with him and talk about how we share the same strains from this work. We share the same disappointments. We share the desire to regularly quit what we are doing. We share the feeling of total inadequacy for the work we try to do. But as we talked about these things, we talked about if we quit, what would actually change in our lives? What would we be doing differently? Even if I was not the “preacher” here at this congregation, what would be different. There is only one thing that would be different: I would not be giving lessons before you each Sunday from the pulpit. Nothing else would change. I would still be teaching. I would still be teaching Bible studies at night. I would still be talking to our weekly guests and trying to get Bible studies. I will still be trying to lift you up. I would still be doing everything I could to reach out and help one another in the word of God. I would be doing as much as I could, but I would have a lot less time to do it. This is one of the great privileges that I appreciate you

giving me is that you afford me to the time to do as much as I can possibly do in all these areas. I help people because that is what Christians do. I teach because that is what Christians do. I offer leadership because that is what Christians do. Being a Christian means accepting the mission. The resurrection of Jesus is not merely a celebration of Jesus conquering sin so that we can have forgiveness of sins. The resurrection of Jesus is the acceptance of the mission. Your mission is share the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins wherever you are. It is not a duty, but our joy to declare Jesus to all. The greatness of Jesus and our joy in Jesus cannot terminate on ourselves but must be extended to others.

Finally, you have one other joy to experience. Jesus walks with his disciples. As he blesses them, Jesus parts from them and ascends to heaven. So what do the disciples do now that Jesus has ascended to the Father? **"And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God."** (Luke 24:52-53 ESV) Worship Jesus and continually bless God. The good news of the risen Jesus must not and cannot be contained when implanted in fertile hearts. The good news propels us to worship and propels us to participate in the mission.