

This is a most austere ending to a sermon, this talk of judgment. Moreover, the whole message has incisive clarity. It is so sensible that we can't help but agree with it, and yet so radical that we are overwhelmed by it. If we try to dodge its demands, the memorable metaphors suck us back in. If we actually try to live it out, we are confronted by our blatant hypocrisy and selfish motives. It is no small wonder that this silenced crowd was amazed at his teaching. They had never heard anything like it. All their best teachers either quoted each other or the Scriptures for support of their arguments. Jesus quoted no other rabbi. And when he quoted Scriptures, he felt perfectly free to go beyond them with that ostentatious phrase, "But I say!" Blomberg is correct: "Such preaching reflects either the height of presumption and heresy or the fact that he was a true spokesman for God, whom we dare not ignore" (p. 135).

The book of Matthew revolves around five speeches, each of which ends with the phrase, "When Jesus had finished saying these things" (7:28-29; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This sermon then, will mark the end of the first section of Matthew's book.

THE GROWING FAME OF JESUS

¹When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ²There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick {paralyzed and in terrible suffering^{MT}} and about to die. ³The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." ⁶So Jesus went with them.

§ 55
Healing the
Centurion's
Servant
 (Lk 7:1-10;
 Mt 8:5-13)



After Jesus' great sermon he returns to Capernaum. While he is there, a notable centurion sends to Jesus a delegation of Jewish elders. They beg Jesus to heal the centurion's servant. Now Matthew says the centurion came himself. Does that mean that Matthew and Luke contradict each other? Not necessarily. Matthew's account is merely an abbreviation of the event. Since the centurion was responsible for the delegation he, himself, is described as coming to Jesus.⁹⁵ Besides, that fits Matthew, since he typically leaves out any positive comments about Jewish leaders.⁹⁶ In contrast, Luke gives the more detailed account which

⁹⁵ Z.C. Hodges, "The Centurion's Faith in Matthew and Luke," *BibSac* 121 (Oct 1964): 321-332, suggests that the centurion did, in fact, come to Jesus, as Matthew says, but only after he had already said, "I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you" (Lk 7:7). Hence the text is not in contradiction, rather the centurion is fickle. But this is unlikely since (1) the point of the story is the sterling faith of the centurion. Fickleness hardly fits that portrait. And (2) the centurion apparently sent even a second delegation (Lk 7:6) to stop Jesus from coming to his house.

⁹⁶ Furthermore, Matthew places this narrative next to the healing of the leper and highlights their similarities. Both the leper and the centurion came to Jesus, were outcasts of Israel, demonstrated great faith, and were accepted by Jesus.

characteristically shows mercy to Gentiles. What we have, then, is not a contradiction but a variation in their presentations.

The emphasis of this passage is on the centurion, not on the sick servant. In fact, even the syntax of this sentence places the word “centurion” in a prominent position so it sticks out even though the subject of the sentence is the servant.

A centurion was a military leader in the Roman army comparable to a lieutenant.⁹⁷ As the title “centurion” suggests, he was in charge of one hundred men. The New Testament speaks of several centurions and all in favorable terms. (1) The centurion at the cross of Christ proclaimed his faith that Jesus was the Son of God or possibly a son of a god (Mt 27:54; Mk 15:39; Lk 23:47). (2) Cornelius, of Acts 10–11, demonstrated full faith in Jesus. He and his house received the Holy Spirit and were baptized. (3) Julius, in Acts 27, guarded Paul on the way to Rome. He was both reasonable and fair. (4) Only one centurion, Acts 22:25-26, may be viewed as a villain. He was about to flog Paul. But he was just doing his job and did, in fact, stop when he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen. Overall, our impression of centurions is positive. They seem to be reasonable, unbiased, and submitted to authority.

His servant is “valued highly.” In several other passages this refers to positions of highest honor. In both Luke 7:7 and Matthew 8:6 he will be referred to, not as a servant, but as a child. In other words, he is more than just a servant. He had become like a son to the centurion.

Upon hearing of Jesus’ reputation for healing, this centurion sends a delegation of Jewish elders to ask Jesus for help. It was rare that Jews would go out of their way for a Gentile. But this was a rare Gentile. He had provided influence and likely much of his own money to help build the Capernaum synagogue. And now, one good deed deserves another.

Lk 7:6-8

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

The delegation of Jewish elders apparently overstep their bounds, or at least the centurion’s desires, when they ask Jesus to go to the man’s house. Thus, a second delegation, comprised of the centurion’s personal friends, is sent to keep Jesus from coming to the house.

Their message is simple: “Don’t trouble yourself” (lit. “Don’t be hassled”). This construction means to “stop” whatever action is in progress. The centurion either sees or hears the procession and doesn’t want Jesus to bother himself fur-

⁹⁷ E. Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 38-42.

ther by entering his home. He is probably not just talking about the trouble of coming all the way to his house. If Jesus were to enter the house of a Gentile, he would be criticized by his own countrymen (cf. Acts 10:28). This centurion is looking out for Jesus' best interests and trying to protect his reputation.

Being a soldier, the centurion understands the power of the spoken word. Jesus doesn't need to be present or touch the servant. He simply needs to command it to be done (cf. Ps 107:20). Such is the nature of authority. Even so, there is no precedent for believing in "distance healing" save the one incident when Jesus healed the nobleman's son in Capernaum while he was twenty miles away in Cana (Jn 4:46-54). Perhaps this fellow had heard about that. Even so, his faith is astounding.

The centurion makes a keen comparison between his military position and the spiritual position of Jesus and his Father. He had superiors from whom he was given authority and subordinates to whom he gave commands. He recognizes that Jesus is granted authority from God and is authorized to give commands to his subordinates (e.g., diseases and elements).

¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹¹I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹²But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Mt 8:10-13

¹³Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.

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

Lk 7:10

This is one of only two times that Jesus was amazed. He is amazed here at the incredible faith of a Gentile, and in Mark 6:6, in Nazareth, he was amazed at the lack of faith of his own countrymen. It is a paradox that the Jews, who had the Scriptures (Rom 3:1-2), would lack faith, while the Gentiles should demonstrate such faith.

Jesus lays out a paradox of his own. The Jews, who would expect to participate in the Messianic banquet (Isa 25:6; Mt 26:29; Lk 22:30), were kicked out. But the foreigners were allowed in. The simple lesson of this narrative is that Jesus respects faith, not ethnicity. Hence, we have a dramatized prediction of Gentile inclusion (Acts 10–11).

Matthew paired the healing of the centurion's servant with the cleansing of the leper to show their similarities. Likewise, Luke pairs it with the raising of the widow's son. In both accounts a precious "child" is raised up when an unlikely candidate receives the Lord's attention.

§ 56
Raising of the
Widow's Son
at Nain
(Lk 7:11-17)



This is the first of three people Jesus raised from the dead. The other two were Jairus's daughter (Mt 9:18-26; Mk 5:22-43; Lk 8:49-56) and Jesus' friend Lazarus (Jn 11). As Elijah raised a widow's son (1 Kgs 17:17-24; cf. Elisha, 2 Kgs 4:32-37), so also does Jesus. Thus, Jesus' ministry looks like the great prophet Elijah's.⁹⁸

Lk 7:11-13

¹¹Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. ¹²As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. ¹³When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

The raising of this widow's son at Nain took place shortly after the healing of the centurion's servant, likely on the very next day.⁹⁹ The little village of Nain ("The Pleasant") is about twenty-five miles southeast of Capernaum just over the hill from Shunem where Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite woman. Surely this was a significant memory for the local residents. The only thing that remains of Nain today are the tombs just outside the city, cut into the sides of the hills. The people of Nain are heading toward one such tomb this particular afternoon. This poor woman has lost both her husband and her son. She is now left without adequate financial support. The whole village must feel for her. A large crowd follows the funeral procession out of the city. It is met by another large crowd going into the city. The first, according to Galilean funeral customs, was led by the woman with her outer garment torn in grief (*Jer. Moed. K.* 83 d).¹⁰⁰ The second crowd, having traveled all day from Capernaum, was led by Jesus. It seems somewhat awkward and almost inappropriate to have this traffic jam interfere with the funeral.

Jewish funerals were often surrounded by elaborate rituals such as a trumpet signal to announce the death, melancholy flutes, and the plaintive tinkle of cymbals. Even the poorest Jews were expected to provide at least two flute players and one mourning woman (*Kethub. iv.4*). The body would have its hair cut and nails trimmed. It would be washed, anointed and wrapped in linen. Then it would be placed face up on a wickerwork bier with the arms folded across the chest. Friends and family would carry the body through the town, taking turns so that as many people as possible could share the honor of carrying the dead. The people of Nain would have joined the procession as it passed them "for it was deemed like mocking one's Creator not to follow the dead to his last rest-

⁹⁸ C.A. Evans, "Luke's Use of the Elijah/Elisha Narratives and the Ethic of Election," *JBL* 106/1 (1987): 75-83, shows how Luke uses the Elijah/Elisha motif a number of times, especially in his central section (Lk 4:25-27; 7:11-17; 9:52-55, 61-62). When he does, he seems to be comparing Jesus to the great prophet(s) who opened God's kingdom to the Gentiles. This fits especially well here, against the backdrop of healing the centurion's servant.

⁹⁹ The word *hexēs* sometimes signifies the very next day, and never a long period of time.

¹⁰⁰ The Midrash explanation was that a woman introduced death, therefore should lead the procession (*Ber. R.* 17).

ing-place” (Edersheim, I:556). If a person was unable to follow, they would at least stand up while the procession passed. Funerals were treated with the greatest reverence partially out of reverence for God and partially due to Jewish superstitions such as the idea that “the spirit of the dead hovered about the unburied remains” (Edersheim, I:554).

Jesus experiences the human emotions of the event and was not left untouched. He hurt for the woman (*splanchnizomai*). He says to her, literally, “Stop crying.” These words, in this situation, would normally be harshly insensitive. But no doubt, Jesus’ tone and demeanor assure her of better things.

Lk 7:14-17

¹⁴Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” ¹⁵The dead man sat up and began to talk and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

¹⁶They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” ¹⁷This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea^a and the surrounding country.

^a ¹⁷Or *the land of the Jews*

Under normal circumstances, no Jew would do what Jesus just did. There was no greater defilement for the Jew than touching a dead body (Num 19:11, 16). But do the rules apply when the corpse comes back to life? Needless to say, there was no rabbinic regulation to cover such a circumstance. The pallbearers are so shocked that they just stop in their tracks.

At Jesus’ command, the young man sits up and begins to talk. Morticians can tell some eerie stories about a body sitting up or moving due to gases in the corpse. But none can tell of any talking. Couldn’t our imaginations run wild with what he said? “Where am I? What do you guys think you’re doing?!” Or perhaps he said, “Boy, that was a good nap. I have never felt better!”

The crowd’s reaction is classic. It is the typical response to one of Jesus’ miracles. They are filled with awe, literally, “Fear seized them all.” That makes sense. Now their fear gives way to praise. They realize that Jesus is a great prophet with power rivaling even Elijah. Through him God has paid them a visit. That is, God has come to care for their needs. This declaration is thick with Messianic implications (Mt 1:23; Lk 1:68, 78; 19:44; Ps 8:4; Isa 29:6; Zeph 2:7; Acts 15:14; Heb 2:6). And the news spread throughout the Jewish territory.¹⁰¹

What does a scientific society do with this passage? Can we actually accept it as a historical event? It seems that aside from a preconceived prejudice against miracles, there is no literary, historical, or theological reason to reject the reality of this event. There is good reason, however, to accept Luke’s testimony of Jesus’ power to raise the dead (Edersheim, I:558-560):

¹⁰¹ The term “Judea” indicates the “country of the Jews” not merely “southern Palestine” which would not fit this context since Nain is in Galilee. But it is not unreasonable to think that the news of this event spread clear to Jerusalem in southern Palestine.

1. It is not reasonable to view this story as exaggeration, nor is it possible to explain it by natural causes. Thus, we are left with two options. Either it is true or it is a designed fiction.¹⁰²
2. Although Luke alone records the raising of the widow's son at Nain, the other three Gospels also record Jesus raising someone from the dead. So Luke is not alone in his witness to Jesus' power over death.
3. There was no Jewish expectation for the Messiah to raise people from the dead. Therefore, there is no clear motive to invent such a story.
4. While this event looks a lot like Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:8-24, esp. vv. 10 & 23 LXX),¹⁰³ there are enough differences to conclude that the account of Jesus' raising the widow's son is not based on Elijah raising the widow's son.
5. Had such a story been invented, an insignificant place like Nain would probably not have been chosen as the setting for such a notable miracle.
6. The event took place in the presence of two great crowds. In Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 4:3, Quadratus claims that some of these witnesses were still alive and could testify before the Emperor.
7. Raisings were not unknown to the early church, and were, in fact, an integral part of the faith for which the Apostles were willing to die (cf. Mt 10:8; Acts 9:40; 20:9-10).

§ 57
Question of
John the
Baptist
 (Mt 11:2-19;
 Lk 7:18-35)

This is a dark hour for John. He has been in prison in Machaerus for some ten months now (cf. Mt 4:12; 14:1-12; Lk 3:19-20). The Scriptures tell us why. John openly rebuked the adulterous and incestuous marriage of Herod. Herodias, his wife, took offense and urged her husband to shut him up (Mt 14:3-5). Thus, he was thrown into prison. There's probably more to the story than that, however. John had a tremendous following. Herod's popularity polls were way down. That combination was fertile soil for a revolt. Thus, John was likely imprisoned to squelch any kind of uprising (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.5.2). Furthermore, we have our suspicions that the Jewish leaders were involved. They didn't like John any more than they liked Jesus. Perhaps their schemes were part of the equation.

Lk 7:18-20
with Mt 11:2

¹⁸John's disciples told him {in prison^{MT}} about all these things {Christ was doing.^{MT}} Calling two of them, ¹⁹he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

¹⁰²The fact that Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius* 4.45) records a similar kind of resuscitation does not mean that both are fictitious. Each account must be examined individually on its own merits for truthfulness and reliability.

¹⁰³T.L. Brodie, "Towards Unravelling Luke's Use of the Old Testament: Lk 7:11-17 as an *IMITATIO* of 1 Kings 17:17-24," *NTS* 32 (1986): 247-267, catalogues a number of these similarities, but also shows some significant differences.

²⁰When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’”

John has a lot of time to reflect in his cell. Death seems imminent. “Has my life been a waste? Is Jesus really the Messiah or was it my imagination running wild?” Such thoughts must have bombarded John’s mind. So he sends two of his few remaining disciples to ask Jesus.

“Are you the one who was to come?”¹⁰⁴ It sounds strange, coming from the mouth of John, to hear his doubt expressed. After all, John was the one who first announced Jesus. Certainly his mother, Elizabeth, had related all the stories surrounding Christ’s birth. He realized that both he and Jesus were fulfilling prophecy. He even saw the divine approval in the form of a dove at Jesus’ baptism (Jn 1:32-34). So why doubt now?

We must remember that John has been in prison for the better part of a year. That’s plenty of time for depression and doubt to set in. To make matters worse, Jesus did not fit the contemporary expectation of the Messiah. From the reports John gets, Jesus is acting weird. Why was he hobnobbing with prostitutes and tax collectors? Why was he not fasting like the rest? Why did he attend all those parties and feasts? His ministry was so unlike what John’s had been. Furthermore, why had Jesus not set John free? Did not the Scriptures predict that the Messiah would release prisoners (Isa 61:1)? What’s he waiting for?

John’s questions are probably not so much from doubt as from impatience. Surely he believes that Jesus is the Messiah. He just wants him to get on with the program. In the following interview, Jesus not only affirms who he is but reaffirms John in such a positive light that John’s dark hour becomes a shining moment.

²¹At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. ²²So he replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^a are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor [Isa 35:5-6; 61:1]. ²³Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”

Lk 7:21-23



^a22The Greek word was used for various diseases affecting the skin—not necessarily leprosy.

These disciples of John arrive at an opportune time. As they question Jesus’ identity, he is performing a variety of miracles. Although Matthew does not mention the fact that John’s disciples witnessed these miracles, he does illustrate each of the miracles mentioned in chapters 8–9. This is one of the prophetic signs of the Messiah (Isa 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 42:7; 61:1-3). Not only can they share these events with John, but there are a lot of eyewitnesses who could verify Jesus’ claims, some of them, no doubt, recipients of his healing touch.

¹⁰⁴This verb is in the present tense; it would be better rendered, “Are you the one who *is* to come,” rather than the NIV past tense.

Jesus mildly rebukes John (Lk 7:23) as well as the crowd around him: “Fortunate is the one who doesn’t get tripped up over me.” Jesus’ miracles prove that he is the Messiah. Now we ought to be willing to accept him for who he is and not try to fit him into our mold. Indeed, Jesus is hard to handle. You might say, he’s offensive. He was back then; he still is today. All this talk of turning the other cheek, getting logs out of your eye, selling your possessions, hating family, carrying a cross. It smacks against the core of our culture. We prefer a more domesticated Jesus, one who’s a bit more bourgeois. But that is simply not an option he gives us. We either accept him for who he is or not at all.

Lk 7:24-28 with
Mt 11:7-11

²⁴After John’s messengers left {as John’s disciples were leaving^{MT}}, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?

²⁵If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in {king’s^{MT}} palaces. ²⁶But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.”^a [Cf. Mk 1:2; Exod 23:20]

²⁸I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John {the Baptist;^{MT}} yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God {heaven^{MT}} is greater than he.”

^a27Mal. 3:1



After the two messengers leave to go back to John, Jesus instructs the crowd. Directly on the heels of that mild rebuke rests this encomium. Jesus offers two obviously false alternatives to this question “Who is John?” (1) A reed shaken by the wind? John was no weakling. Not only was John physically strong, growing up in the desert, but he firmly held to definite and sturdy moral convictions. (2) A man dressed in fine clothes? Hardly! Camels’ hair is about as far as you can get from fine clothes.

John the Baptist was subordinate as a prophet and as a human being only to Jesus Christ. This is a powerful and somewhat surprising statement. After all, John is in a long line of great men of faith: Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David, etc. So what made John so great?

(1) John served as the forerunner of Christ (esp. Mal 3:1). None other was given the privilege and awesome responsibility of pointing out and baptizing the Messiah, the God-Man. John at no point faltered in his task. His job was great, and he executed it admirably.

(2) He broke the four-hundred-year gap of prophetic silence. In addition he was amazingly popular. The whole country went out to hear him and to be baptized by him. A large group of personal disciples crowded around him as a testimony to his power and popularity.

(3) John portrayed divine humility. In spite of all John’s popularity, he exalted Jesus. In fact, he said he was not even worthy to untie the shoes of Jesus. Then, when John’s own disciples asked what to do about the decline in

their ranks due to the popularity of Jesus, John immortalized these words: “He must increase but I must decrease” (Jn 3:30).

“Among those born of women” is a Semitic idiom meaning “humanity.” Aside from Jesus Christ, there is no greater person in the world. Yet, astounding as it seems, even the least in the kingdom of God, is greater than John. How could the least little Christian be greater than John (and by extension Abraham, Moses, David, etc.)? (1) We are filled with the personal presence of the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:38-39; 16:7; Acts 1:7-8). (2) We are involved with a better covenant (Heb 8:8-12; 2 Cor 3:7-18), thereby (a) the Law of God is in our minds and hearts, (b) we have a personal relationship with God, (c) we have a personal knowledge of God, and (d) our sins are forgiven. (3) We are children of promise and not of will or law (Rom 9:8; Gal 4:28).

Christians have greater privileges than John and therefore greater responsibility. But Jesus is not talking about privilege but character. The privileges listed above are not just what we are given, they are what we become. We cannot separate our new nature in Christ from our gifts in Christ. I am filled with the Holy Spirit, therefore a partaker in divinity. I am forgiven from sins, therefore sinless. I know God personally, therefore I am a friend of God. Christians are greater than John, not because of what they have done for God but because of what God has done for them.

¹²⁴“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.

Mt 11:12-15

¹³For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. ¹⁵He who has ears, let him hear.”

Verse 12 poses a particularly difficult problem for interpreters (cf. Lk 16:16). Some view it as a positive statement. That is, men of force, with forceful faith, take the initiative to seize the opportunity to follow Christ.¹⁰⁵ However, the words *biazetai* and *harpazō* indicate violence and generally carry a negative connotation. In Josephus these two words are often used together, as they are here, usually in a context of war, violence and/or oppression. In fact, the phrase “seize *her* by force” (v. 12), is the phrase used to describe rape.¹⁰⁶ It is clear, then, that these violent men are outsiders who do not understand the kingdom and so use force rather than persuasion.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the conjunction *de*, which the NIV leaves untranslated at v. 12, seems to indicate a contrast from

¹⁰⁵ *Biazetai* could only be viewed as positive if it were in the middle voice, rather than the passive. But both the Syrian Peshitta and the Old Syriac translations render it as a passive. Hence, the kingdom “is suffering violence” rather than “forcefully advancing.” Furthermore, the Syrian Peshitta interpretively translates the “violent men” as “Shepherd-Rulers.” This, probably reflects the theology of Ezek 34, and gives credence to the idea that the Pharisees were leading this violent assault against the newly announced kingdom. E. Moore, “Violence to the Kingdom,” *ExpT* 100 (1980): 174-177.

¹⁰⁶ Here the feminine pronoun *autēn* refers to the kingdom, not a woman.

¹⁰⁷ E. Moore, “*BIAZO*, *HARPAZO* and Cognates in Josephus,” *NTS* 21 (1975): 519-543.



what precedes it. Thus, the positive nature of the kingdom, underscored in v. 11 is contrasted in verse twelve with men's violent response to it.

This also explains the historical setting. The populace eagerly awaited the Messianic kingdom. Yet, when it came, they responded violently against it: (1) John the Baptist is imprisoned and about to be beheaded. (2) The Pharisees now oppose Jesus at every turn, contradicting his teachings with their cumbersome oral traditions. (3) The populace continually attempts to thrust Jesus into a political role as the leader of a rebellion (cf. Jn 6:15). Satan's schemes against this newly proclaimed kingdom are obvious.

Jesus proclaims John to be the fulfillment of Elijah (cf. Mal 3:1; 4:6; cf. Lk 1:17); not a physical reincarnation, which John himself denied (Jn 1:21), but the spiritual harbinger of a new age.

Lk 7:29-30

²⁹(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. ³⁰But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

Jesus' description of John elicits two responses from the crowd. The people, including the tax collectors, say, "Yea, that's right!" They had experienced John firsthand because they humbled themselves to be baptized by him. The Pharisees, on the other hand, have rejected John's baptism and thus Jesus too. They were not about to admit that John was right (Mt 21:23-27). Even though some Pharisees came out to John, ostensibly to be baptized (Mt 3:7; cf. Jn 1:19-27) (and some undoubtedly were), the majority of the Pharisees came to John to question him and entrap him. If the Pharisees were murderously jealous of Jesus' popularity, it is reasonable to assume they were of John's as well.

Lk 7:31-35 with
Mt 11:19

³¹"To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? ³²They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other:

"We played the flute for you,
and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
and you did not cry."

³³For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' ³⁴The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."' ³⁵But wisdom is proved right by all her children {actions.^{MT}}"

Jesus compares his contemporaries with children pretending in the marketplace. First they tried to play "wedding," but the other children wouldn't cooperate. Then they tried to play "funeral." But again, the other children refused to play their game. This was the situation with Jesus and John vs. the Pharisees and Sadducees. The religious leaders wanted to play games that Jesus and John would not play. It infuriated them. So the leaders attacked them. They said John

had a demon and Jesus was a drunkard. By categorizing them, they didn't have to deal with their person and teaching. But that is not the end of the discussion. The true analysis is found at the end of verse 35.

"Wisdom is proved right . . ." The verb "proved right" [aorist passive], could be literally translated, "Wisdom has been made righteous." It may not yet be fully apprehended, but it has been fully proved by her deeds. Both Jesus and John led blameless lives. In no way could their behavior be criticized. Thus, by their lives they demonstrated their wisdom. They were right, regardless of the criticism and characterization by their opponents.

John's doubts certainly would have plagued the crowds. If John doubted, perhaps, there is room to question Jesus' identity. Added to this, the accusations of the Pharisees, coupled with Jesus' "inappropriate" behavior and preaching, would cause many in the crowd to have doubts of their own. Jesus not only fairly answers John's questions about himself, but also reaffirms John's greatness. For those who still have doubts, Jesus does not defend himself. He simply says, wait and watch, my deeds will speak for themselves.

We have here a very odd text. The cities which should have responded to Jesus' miracles don't (vv. 20-24). The people who you would expect to know God are in the dark. But those you would expect to be left out are in the know (vv. 25-26). Jesus, who is clearly God's man (v. 27) turns out to be gentle and humble (v. 29, cf. Mt 3:15; 8:17; 12:19; 21:5). He puts a yoke of labor on our necks which turns out to be liberating and light (vv. 28-30).

§ 58
Woes to
Unrepentant
Cities
(Mt 11:20-30;
cf. Lk 10:13-15)

²⁰Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ^{21a}Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths.^a If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

Mt 11:20-24



^a ²³Greek *Hades*¹⁰⁸

Korazin and Bethsaida were suburbs of Capernaum, which was the home base for Jesus' Galilean ministry. More than any other locale, they were blessed by Jesus' presence and privileged to witness his miraculous ministry. Here Jesus

¹⁰⁸ That is, the abode of the dead. Here it symbolizes the depths, the farthest one can get from the presence of God.

had healed the nobleman's son, the paralytic, a demoniac in the synagogue, Peter's mother-in-law, the centurion's servant, Jairus's daughter, the woman with a flow of blood, two blind men, a dumb-demoniac, and scads of others. The large crowds obviously enjoyed Jesus, but they did not respond appropriately with repentance.

In contrast to these cities, Jesus highlights Tyre and Sidon, the epitome of Israel's enemies (cf. Isa 23; Ezek 26–38; Amos 1:9-10), and Sodom, the epitome of sin (Gen 19). The Jews held these places in contempt, and that is the “punch” in Jesus' statement. Had Jesus gone to these pagan places, they would have gladly repented even in sackcloth and ashes, the Jewish sign of deep remorse (Esth 4:1,3; Isa 58:5; Jer 6:26; Dan 9:3; Lk 10:13). The heavy coarse material made sturdy sacks, but lousy linen. The disheveled hair and an ash-smeared face was a pathetic picture of the way one felt inside.

The point is that there will be greater judgment for those who had opportunity to accept Christ but did not, than for those who had no opportunity at all. With greater revelation comes greater accountability (cf. Rom 2:12-16). Since Jesus worked in these cities (Mt 4:15-16), they were expected to respond. Because they did not, they were doomed.¹⁰⁹

Mt 11:25-27

²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

²⁷“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Jesus adds a second paradox to this narrative: The wise, whom you would expect to be well informed, actually were not. But the children, whom you would expect to be ignorant, received special revelation. Now, it's not that the wise guys are ignorant or stupid. They know all kinds of stuff about the world, and they may even know all about God. But they don't know him personally. That kind of knowledge comes only through revelation. And such revelation had been reserved for the little ones. Jesus, the only one who really knows the Father, chooses to introduce him to the humble, lowly, least and lost. The all-powerful Son of God (Mt 28:18; Col 1:16-19) empowers the weak of this world and overpowers the strong.¹¹⁰



¹⁰⁹ McGarvey notes that within thirty years all three of these cities would be destroyed (p. 288). Whereas “Tyre and Sidon received the gospel (Acts 21:3; 27:3), Tiberias became the seat of Jewish Talmudism” (pp. 286-287).

¹¹⁰ This is such a bold claim of Jesus' divine relationship that some scholars assert that Jesus could not have actually said this about himself. Rather, it must have been a designation of the early church. But I.H. Marshall demonstrates that this is, in fact, what Jesus thought and claimed about himself. I.H. Marshall, “The Divine Sonship of Jesus,” *Int* 21 (1967): 89-103.

²⁸⁴“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Mt 11:28-30

What a winsome invitation! For a hurried and harried people, these are refreshing words, especially when we consider that they are surrounded by controversy and rejection of Jesus. This invitation, therefore, is like the eye of the storm — calm surrounded by turmoil. Yet this text is paradoxical. In verse 28 Jesus says, “I will give you rest.” Then he turns right around and says, “Take my yoke upon you.” The yoke often symbolized the Law (Gal 5:1; Acts 15:10; Sirach 51:26). The Jews did not consider the Law cruel slavery but a gift. It proved they were God’s special people. Therefore, the yoke of the Law was not abject oppression but voluntarily placing oneself under the direct rule of God and working for him. But the Pharisees added so many rules to God’s Law that it did become a terrible burden. Jesus frees us from all that by inviting us to be yoked with him. “The yoke of Jesus as understood by Matthew was not one of fidelity to a code but of dedication to a Person who was God’s representative among men.”¹¹¹

But how can Jesus say his yoke is easy and burden light when in Matthew 10:38 he called us to take up a cross and follow him? Well, the word *easy* does not imply “effortless,” but rather “appropriate,” “suitable,” or even “kindly.” Jesus’ work is not “a breeze,” but it is “fitting.” Furthermore, this does not exempt Christians from difficulties or suffering. Yet, even the cross is *light* in that it is liberating. We are freed from the bondage and decay of this world (Mt 6:33), from the penalty of the law (Gal 5:1-4), and the incessant appetite for the praise of men (Jn 5:41-44). That is, indeed, good news. Matthew illustrates how this rest works by bumping it up against two Sabbath controversies (Mt 12:1-14). The first describes Jesus picking grain on the Sabbath; in the second he heals a man’s withered hand. Bacchiocchi suggests that these in turn illustrate the two dominant themes of rest in Jesus: redemption (Mt 12:1-8) and restoration (Mt 12:9-14).¹¹² Because Jesus saves us and restores us, we can rest in his yoke.

This incident is similar to another recorded in Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9 and John 12:1-8.¹¹³ In both instances a woman enters the banquet of a man named Simon and anoints Jesus with oil from an alabaster jar. But there are some significant differences:

§ 59
Jesus
Anointed by a
Sinful Woman
(Lk 7:36-50)

¹¹¹ M. Maher, “Take My Yoke Upon You,” *NTS* 22 (1975): 97-103.

¹¹² S. Bacchiocchi, “Matthew 11:28-30: Jesus’ Rest and the Sabbath,” *AUSS* 22/3 (1984): 289-316.

¹¹³ Many scholars, in fact, assume that there was actually only one anointing and the other account(s) were edited for theological reasons. Cf. R. Holst, “The One Anointing of Jesus: Another Application of the Form-Critical Method” *JBL* 95/3 (1976): 435-446; and J.K. Elliott, “The Anointing of Jesus,” *ExpT* 85 (1973-74): 105-107.

1. They were in two different locations: House of the Pharisee vs. house of a leper.
2. Here in Luke, only his feet were anointed. In the parallels his feet and head were anointed.
3. The tears mentioned in Luke are absent from the other accounts.
4. Luke's account takes place in the middle of Jesus' Galilean ministry. The parallels occur the week before Christ's crucifixion.
5. Two different lessons are taught. The focus of this account is the repentance of this sinful woman. The focus of the other is the large amount of money splurged on Jesus rather than the poor.

Therefore, we conclude that this is a separate anointing from the one reported in Matthew, Mark and John.¹¹⁴

Lk 7:36-38

³⁶Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, ³⁸and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

Jesus, as a famed rabbi, is invited to a banquet at Simon the Pharisee's house. So far in Luke, every time Jesus encounters a Pharisee, there has been trouble (Lk 5:17-20, 30; 6:2, 6-11). Now we don't want to accuse an innocent man, but we are suspicious that this dinner invitation is a setup. After all, Simon's comrades are there in typical form (v. 49). And Simon, as we shall see, neglects the normal niceties one would expect from a friend.

The Jews ate special meals at a table which was just inches off the ground. They laid on their left side on a pillow. Each person's head would be at the table with their feet pointing away from it. As the honored guest, Jesus would likely lay at Simon's back.

In walks this nameless woman with a reputation all over town.¹¹⁵ What was her sin? We can't know for sure, but prostitution is probably the best guess.¹¹⁶ That would explain why (1) she had a reputation all over town, (2) her hair was let down rather than hidden under a veil, and (3) Simon recoiled when she touched Jesus.

How does a woman of her standing get into Simon's house in the first place? During such feasts people were often allowed to observe the festivities, sometimes talk with the guests, and even receive some of the leftovers. This

¹¹⁴Agreeing with this position are A. Legault, "An Application of the Form-Critique Method to the Anointings in Galilee and Bethany," *CBQ* 16 (1954): 131-145; and a number of early church fathers going back to Origen, Tatian and Chrysostom.

¹¹⁵Some have suggested that she is Mary Magdalene, from whom seven demons were cast out (Mk 16:9), since Mary is introduced in the very next pericope (Lk 8:2). But we simply can't prove that.

¹¹⁶T. Cavalcanti, "Jesus, the Penitent Woman and the Pharisee," *JHLT* 2/1 (1994): 28-40.

woman takes advantage of the custom in order to get close to Jesus. Another possibility is that she had been to the house before on business. Again, we don't want to accuse Simon unjustly, but this wouldn't be the first, or last, time a religious leader did such a thing.

She carries with her an alabaster jar of ointment. Such a jar was commonly kept on a string or chain around a woman's neck, tucked into her clothing. This was as safe a place as any for such a costly item. It was also convenient to keep this ointment on hand which was used both as a perfume and a breath freshener. (Both were important in her line of work.) Alabaster is a translucent stone which was reamed out to make a jar for such precious ointments. This is a fairly substantial gift that she is bringing. A similar gift was valued at a year's wages (Jn 12:5).

This is a passionate scene. She comes to Jesus with the obvious intent of anointing him with the ointment. She winds up paying respect in four different ways:

1. Her tears wash his feet. The verb "wet" is translated in other places, "rain." Tears streamed down her face and fell profusely upon his feet. Enough tears, in fact, to wash them.
2. Wiped his feet with her hair. All vanity is gone (cf. 1 Cor 11:15). With the most humble act she ministers to the Lord.
3. Kissed his feet. This is a strengthened form of the verb "kiss." In other words, she kissed his feet profusely.
4. Anointed his feet with ointment. Ointment was more expensive than oil. It has a heavy, rich smell like perfume. The word used here for "anoint" is not the normal religious act ("to pour") but what we might translate as "rub" or "massage."

³⁹When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

Lk 7:39-43

⁴⁰Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

⁴¹"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii,^a and the other fifty. ⁴²Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

⁴³Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

^a⁴¹A denarius was a coin worth about a day's wages.

Simon's thoughts can be summarized in the following logical syllogism:

*A: If Jesus were a prophet he would know what kind of woman she is.*¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷A common characteristic of a prophet was to discern the thoughts and lifestyle of people (cf. Isa 11:2-4; 1 Kgs 14:6; 2 Kgs 1:1-3; 5:26).

*B: If Jesus knew what kind of woman she was he would not let her touch him.*¹¹⁸

C: Jesus is letting her touch him.

THEREFORE: Jesus must not be a prophet.

The problem with this syllogism is in minor premise “B.” Based on his own cultural presuppositions, the Pharisee assumes that the Messiah would not let a prostitute touch him. That is where he is mistaken.

Jesus is about to prove to Simon that he not only knows exactly who this woman is, he knows exactly what Simon is thinking. He says, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” Unaware that Jesus has perceived his thoughts, in a very respectful way he says, “Tell me, teacher.” What hypocrisy! What is running through his mind and running out his mouth are two different things.

Jesus responds with a simple parable about a moneylender. He’s somewhere between a respectable banker and crooked loan shark. In other words, he’s not going to be too generous. But let’s pretend that this one just happened to release these two from their debt. It might be literally translated, “He made a gift of their debt.”

A denarius represented a full day’s wage for the average workman. Thus, one fellow owed about a month and a half’s salary, the other guy owed ten times as much, nearly two years’ salary.

So who would love the moneylender more? Simon’s “I suppose” seems to have an air of supercilious indifference. He likely suspects he’s about to get nailed, but can’t figure out just how.

Lk 7:44-47

⁴⁴Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”

This is a tender scene. Jesus looks at the woman but speaks to Simon. He compares the way the two have treated him:

1. Washing the feet — This was an important part of hospitality. After walking along dusty roads in sandals, a person’s feet would be dirty. It was courteous to have your servant wash a guest’s feet. It would save your guest the embarrassment of dirtying your carpets. Simon did not take the extra effort to get that done. This woman, however, not only washes his feet but does it with her own tears and hair.
2. Greetings of a kiss — There is nothing romantic implied in either of the

¹¹⁸ Jews would not even speak with respectable women in public, let alone allow a sinful woman to touch them. Likely she should have been considered unclean due to her occupational activities.

kisses. Males normally greeted one another with a kiss on the cheek. Simon did not show Jesus that affection. This woman not only kissed him, but in abject humility, kissed his feet. Furthermore, she's still down at his feet fervently kissing them [*kataphileō*].

3. Anointing — This was a special sign of honor. It was often done with olive oil. That was the normal household oil. Simon does not so honor Jesus. This woman, however, not only anoints him, but does so with ointment, which was much more valuable than oil. And instead of honoring Jesus' head, she honors even his feet. That was seen as an extreme luxury (Pliny, *H.N.* 13:4).

Verse 47 continues this comparison between Simon and the prostitute. She has much to be forgiven, therefore she loves much. Simon has little to be forgiven, therefore he loves little. But the fact is that Simon is as unable to pay his debt as is this prostitute. Jesus stoops no lower in allowing this woman to touch him than when he enters Simon's house to eat with him. The bottom line is, we all need Jesus.

⁴⁸Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

⁴⁹The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Lk 7:48-50



⁵⁰Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

For the second time at this meal Jesus is the subject of debate. This same debate arose many months ago in Capernaum when four men lowered their paralytic friend on a pallet. Jesus forgave his sins and then proved his power to do so by healing him (Lk 5:17-26). This time he offers no evidence, no proof. In fact, he apparently ignores the rumblings going on about the room. Instead he concentrates on this vulnerable woman.

"Your faith has saved you." This short verse is packed with meaning. First, her faith did not actually save her. Jesus did, for only he can save. But he saves those who respond to him in faith. Furthermore, her faith is not seen by a confession but by her actions of lavish worship. Indeed, our faith can only be measured by our actions.

Jesus proclaims, "You have been saved" [Gk perfect tense], so she can now "go in peace." She may not look any different, but she is because she has already been saved. She still has a lot to work out. She will still have to overcome temptation, social stigma, and poverty without this occupation. Her peace comes from within now. She is truly at peace for Jesus has forgiven her sins.

¹After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, ²and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases; Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; ³Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

§ 60
Support of
Jesus' Tour
by Women
 (Lk 8:1-3)

This is an interesting little section. It opens the door to Jesus' second Galilean tour, and it opens a window on Jesus' ministry. The twelve "with Jesus" (v. 1) likely begin to participate in preaching alongside the Master. They are not the only ones to accompany him. Surprisingly, there are a number of prominent women who support Jesus' ministry financially. Against social custom, they continue to travel with Jesus' disciples until the very end (Lk 23:55).¹¹⁹ Luke again shows consistent interest in women as did Jesus.

Mary Magdalene was often associated with Jesus. He released her from seven demons, and she was one of the first witnesses to his resurrection (Mk 16:9).

Joanna was the wife of Cuza, the curator or manager of Herod's household. It was his duty to see that the funds and resources were distributed properly. This was a position of no small influence. We do not know that Cuza shared his wife's affections for Christ. If he didn't, he certainly could have stopped her. Her financial contributions were probably quite significant. Obviously Jesus' influence extended beyond the "working class."

The financial contributions of these and other women were a significant support for Jesus and the Apostles. Peter, Andrew, James, and John also likely received a stipend from their fishing business in Capernaum. These funds, placed in the care of Judas Iscariot, would go for food, taxes, supplies, clothes and even lodging if necessary.

§ 61
Blasphemy of
the Holy Spirit
 (Mt 12:22-37;
 Mk 3:20-30;
 cf. Lk 11:14-23)

[MK 3:20] Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

[MT 12:22] Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. ²³All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

Jesus' ministry is at a critical and frenzied stage. He's trying to get the Twelve to see who he really is. At the same time he's mobbed by crowds who want to touch him for healing. He's also being interrogated by the Pharisees from Jerusalem who want to do him in. His family¹²⁰ gets wind of all this, and so

¹¹⁹ Witherington points out that while these women may have served the Apostolic band in traditional roles, the very fact that women followed a rabbi as disciples would have been scandalous in that day. (B. Witherington III, "On the Road with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and Other Disciples — Luke 8:1-3," *ZNW* 70 [1979]: 243-248.) Sim goes even further. He says (1) These women (mostly single, widows and a few former prostitutes) were full-fledged disciples, not mere maids. (2) Since rich disciples were made to give up other money, these women did more than make voluntary contributions. Jesus' band was a communistic experiment like we read of in Acts. (David C. Sim, "The Women Followers of Jesus: The Implications of Luke 8:1-3," *HeyJ* 30 [1989]: 51-62.)

¹²⁰ Lit. "Those from him." It may be rendered as "family" (NIV), "relatives" (Modern), "friends"

here they come too. They want to nab him,¹²¹ ostensibly for his own health or safety, and whisk him away from all the commotion. He is so popular that he can't even eat!¹²²

At this time his brothers do not believe in him and are perhaps motivated by jealousy (Jn 7:1-5). One can almost hear them say, "Alright, this little charade has gone on long enough! All this activity and popularity has made him crazy. Let's take him back home and knock some sense into him." In fact, Mark lays out his narrative like a sandwich with Jesus' family on each side of this Phara-saic accusation that Jesus is empowered by Beelzebub. This narrative structure seems to suggest that Jesus' family is on a par with the Pharisees.

Jesus' deeds are defense enough for both his identity and his sanity (cf. Jn 5:36). The fact that he can cast out this demon and restore this man's sight and speech should silence all accusations against Jesus. The crowds certainly pay attention. Their question, "Could this be the Son of David?" although framed so as to expect a negative answer, clearly identifies Jesus as the Messiah.¹²³ This sets the stage for a showdown between the Pharisees and Jesus. They simply can't afford to let this belief in Jesus spread, nor can they simply sweep him under a carpet and pretend that he doesn't exist.

²⁴But when the Pharisees {teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem^{Mk}} heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub,^a the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."

Mt 12:24-28 with
Mk 3:22-23,
Lk 11:20

²⁵Jesus knew their thoughts {and spoke to them in parables^{Mk}} and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? ²⁷And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people¹²⁴ drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁸But if I drive out demons by the Spirit {finger^{Lk}} of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

^a ²⁴Greek *Beezeboul* or *Beelzeboul*, also in verse 27



(KJV), or "own people" (NASB). It at least indicates those who were closer to Jesus than the demanding multitudes.

¹²¹ This verb, "to take charge of" often means "to arrest" (Mk 6:17; 12:12; 14:1; etc.). Here it certainly indicates physically and perhaps forcefully grabbing hold of Jesus and taking him away.

¹²² Jesus may be too busy to eat, but Neufeld offers another possibility. Intertestamental literature describes fasting as one of the preparations for exorcism. If that is what Jesus is doing, that would fit the context well. It would also explain his family's consternation since many of the exorcistic rituals involved bizarre behaviors. Dietmar Neufeld, "Eating, Ecstasy, and Exorcism (Mk 3:21)," *BTB* 26/4 (1996): 152-162.

¹²³ The title "Son of David" is used to identify Jesus seven times in Matthew. With the exception of the genealogy (1:1) and the triumphal entry (21:9), they are all in the context of healing (9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:15). Thus, the people expected the Messiah, the "Son of David," to be able to heal them. D.C. Duling, "The Therapeutic Son of David: An Element in Matthew's Christological Apologetic," *NTS* 24 (1978): 392-410.

¹²⁴ Lit. "your sons" meaning those who share your character.

Beelzebul was a Canaanite god whose name means *lord of the house/temple*. He may have represented the lord of demons (cf. Mt 10:26; 12:25, 26; Mk 3:22, 27). But the Jews mocked him by changing his name ever so slightly. If you exchange the final “l” with a “b” his name becomes Beelzebub, *the lord of flies* (cf. 2 Kings 1:2-16).

The accusation against Jesus is clear. They say Jesus casts out demons, not by the power of God, but by the power of Satan. Jesus offers two logical proofs against their accusation. First, Satan would only destroy his own work if he allowed his demons to be cast out. It’s not that Satan *couldn’t* cast out demons, but that he *wouldn’t*. Their suggestion that Jesus works for Satan is absurd.

Second, if Jesus is empowered by Satan, then who empowers the other Jewish exorcists?¹²⁵ This same accusation then applies to them. Since the Pharisees share the same character as their “sons,” the Jewish exorcists, they condemn themselves as being empowered by Satan.

But what if they are wrong? What if Jesus actually does cast out demons by the Spirit of God? Then these fellows are in a heap of trouble because they are fighting against the oncoming kingdom and power of God.

Mt 12:29-32 with
Lk 11:21-22,
Mk 3:29-30

^{29a}Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house. {When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.^{LKJ}}

^{30a}“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. ³¹And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven {he is guilty of an eternal sin.^{MKJ}} ³²Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” {He said this because they were saying, “He has an evil spirit.”^{MKJ}}

Jesus has just explained that he is not empowered by Satan. Therefore, he has overpowered Satan by plundering his possessions. Satan is the strong man (v. 29), and Jesus is the one who has bound him (cf. Jude 6; Rev 20:2). Furthermore, those who are not plundering Satan with Jesus are against him. Now, if you have a strong man who is bound and a stronger man who tied him up, whose side do you want to be on? Jesus is drawing a line in the sand and saying, “Get on his side or mine!” Although his words are directed to the

¹²⁵ R. Shirock, “Whose Exorcists Are They? The Referents of Hoi Huioi Humōn at Mt 12:27 & Lk 11:19,” *JSNT* 46 (1992): 41-51, suggests that Jesus refers not to the Jewish exorcists but to his own disciples. (1) Jewish exorcists are nowhere supported in the NT. (2) The function of judgment will later be given to the Twelve (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30). And (3) the Apostles have just returned from a preaching/healing tour where they cast out demons. Thus, Jesus would be understood to say, “These disciples of mine are your own kinsmen and are doing the same thing. Will you accuse all of us of being in league with Satan?” Chrysostom and a number of early church fathers agreed with this interpretation.

Pharisees and scribes, his entire audience now has to make a choice. They have to get on one side of the fence or the other.

These Pharisees who aligned against Jesus, by default, aligned with the Devil and were dangerously close to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Blasphemy is essentially reviling or criticizing another. Jesus casts out the demon by the power of the Spirit. But the Pharisees attribute it to the power of Beelzebul (Satan). Thus, they call the Holy Spirit the unholy spirit. Such an insult to the Holy Spirit is not a forgivable sin (cf. Isa 5:20).

Why could criticism against Jesus be forgiven, but not criticism against the Holy Spirit? God incarnate (in the person of Jesus) was such a radical concept that some misunderstanding or skepticism is predictable. Until sufficient evidence had been given to validate Jesus' claims, it is understandable that some would doubt. However, there is no reason to be critical of the Holy Spirit, especially his role in casting out demons. Such cynicism and unbelief is motivated by a blatant refusal to accept God's evidence. Without such evidence there can be no valid faith. Without faith there is no forgiveness of sins.

Thus, it is not the actual blasphemy that is unforgivable, but the impenetrable attitude of willful unbelief. This also appears to be the explanation of the sin that leads to death (1 Jn 5:16) as well as the point at which a person can no longer repent (Heb 6:4-6). Some worry that they have committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. But the fact that they are concerned seems to exclude the possibility of their having done it. Willful, high-handed rejection of God's purpose is the problem (cf. Num 15:30-31), not a particular word or deed.

There are a number of sins against the Holy Spirit: rebellion (Isa 63:10), lying (Acts 5:3-9), resisting (Acts 7:51), using for selfish gain (Acts 8:18-22), grieving (Eph 4:30), quenching (1 Thess 5:19), disobedience (Heb 10:29). Blasphemy is the only unforgivable sin (Mt 12:31-32; Mk 3:29; Lk 12:10).

³³"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. ³⁴You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. ³⁶But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ³⁷For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

Mt 12:33-37

Our words are powerful things! As fruit displays the inner goodness of a tree, so our words display the goodness of our hearts. In fact, our words are such an accurate barometer of our thoughts, and such an accurate predictor of our actions, that we will be judged by them.

§ 62
Pharisees
Rebuked for
Seeking a Sign
 (Mt 12:38-45;
 cf. Lk 11:24-36)

Jesus has just claimed to cast out demons by the power of God. It is only natural that the Pharisees ask for some heavenly verification of such a bold claim. This is not a new discussion. Once already we have seen the Pharisees in Jerusalem ask for a sign (Jn 2:18-23). These two events are paralleled in several ways: (1) The unbelieving demand for a sign immediately followed a great “miracle” of Jesus (Jn 2:12-17, Jesus clears the temple; here Jesus has just healed a deaf/blind demoniac). (2) In both instances Jesus refused to perform for them but pointed to his resurrection as the ultimate evidence. (3) Jesus continues to perform miracles which served as adequate evidence for those inclined toward faith. (See Mt 16:1-4 for a similar, but shorter, incident.)

Mt 12:38-42 with
 Lk 11:16,29

³⁸Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you {from heaven.^{Lk}}.”

{As the crowds increased^{Lk}} ³⁹He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. ⁴²The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.”

The crowds increase because of this hot debate, which started clear back in Matthew 12:24 (and Lk 11:14). People are crowding in to see what all the fuss is about. Voices are raising and Jesus is getting rather deliberate and direct — “Wicked and adulterous generation!” He uses the OT comparison of idolatry to adultery. The Pharisees, like their forefathers, are rejecting God’s spokesman, yea, even God incarnate, to protect their own positions of power and prestige.

What was so wicked about seeking a sign? Does not God validate his messengers with signs? Yes. But Jesus has already demonstrated his claims to deity with signs. Not only had he cast out a demon from the dumb man moments before, but he has performed a slew of miracles both in Galilee and Judea: turning water to wine, reading minds, healing all kinds of sickness, casting out demons, cleansing leprosy, healing paralysis and blindness, and even raising the boy at Nain. To seek a sign now, is to disbelieve what Jesus has done before. They are seeking, but not wanting to find. Unbelief like that may look noble, but is insidiously hard.

They ask for a sign from heaven, that is, from God himself (Lk 11:16; cf. Exod 19:22-24; 16:4; Josh 10:12; 1 Sam 7:9-10; 12:16-18; 1 Kgs 18:36-38; 2 Kgs 1:10; Isa 38:8). Signs were required under four circumstances: (1) to verify a prophetic utterance, (2) to justify an unusual action (cf. Jn 2:18), (3) to back up

an utterance of doctrinal import (e.g., forgiveness of sins, Mk 2:6) and (4) to support a Messianic claim.¹²⁶ The sign had to correspond to the claim or action at the time. It was not about power but appropriate verification. They were not so much rejecting Jesus' previous miracles as saying, "Those don't apply to your present claims." Nevertheless, they are not looking for evidence to believe in Jesus. They are looking for an excuse to criticize him and thus dissuade the crowds from following him. This is clear enough from the previous section.

The sign of Jonah is an obvious reference to the resurrection.¹²⁷ Jonah, with minimal and reluctant preaching, led the entire pagan city of Nineveh to repentance. Jesus, with many miracles, incredible sermons, and a pure life, could not lead this chosen race to repentance. The Ninevites thus displayed hearts of faith while the Jews display unbelief.

Matthew 12:40 extends the sign of Jonah to the three days and nights he spent in the belly of the fish. Likewise, Jesus' greatest sign will be the resurrection when he comes out of the belly of the earth after three days and nights.¹²⁸ But even that will not be enough to shatter such hardened unbelief (Lk 16:31).

The Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10:1ff) was yet another testimony against the unbelief of the Jews. Here was a pagan impressed with human wisdom. Yet God's chosen people are not even impressed with divine wisdom demonstrated in Jesus and validated through his miracles.

Both illustrations show the classic Jewish argument of lesser to greater. Jesus' spiritual wisdom is greater than Solomon's worldly wisdom.¹²⁹ And yet the Queen of Sheba traveled far to hear Solomon. This generation rejects Jesus even though he comes to their front door. Likewise, Jonah did no miracles, but merely preached reluctantly for forty days. Jesus and his Apostles validated their forty years of preaching with great signs but were still rejected up until the destruction of Jerusalem. These pagans, therefore, rise in judgment as a reminder of the severe unbelief of the Jews. The bottom line is that the Jewish nation is going from bad to worse because of their greater rejection even with greater opportunity (cf. Mt 10:15; 11:21-24).

¹²⁶ O. Linten, "The Demand for a Sign from Heaven," *ST* 19 (1965): 12-29.

¹²⁷ E.H. Merrill asserts that Jonah's regurgitation would be particularly important to the Ninevites whose probable capital was supposedly founded by a fish god who was subsequently worshiped there. ("The Sign of Jonah," *JETS* 23/1 [Mar 1980]: 23-30.) J. Swetham, however, asserts that the sign of Jonah was his prediction of Nineveh's destruction and therefore prophetic of Jerusalem's demise. Since a wicked city repented through reluctant preaching, Jerusalem will certainly be judged for not repenting with Jesus' preaching. The resurrection talk is merely the point of comparison that justifies further comparison of the prophecy against each city (*Biblica* 68 [1987]: 74-79).

¹²⁸ There is no need to seek three 24-hour periods. Even Jesus' language indicates this is a general time: "On the third day," "after three days," and "three days and three nights."

¹²⁹ The illustration of Solomon in this context of exorcism is fitting since he is portrayed in intertestamental literature as a powerful magician and exorcist, yet Jesus casts out demons by the authority of his word rather than some secret incantation or formula. Cf. Larry Perkins, "Greater Than Solomon (Mt 12:42), *TrinJ* 19/2 (1998): 207-217.

Mt 12:43-45

⁴³“When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”

Popular Jewish wisdom at the time said that demons inhabited deserts (as well as toilets, marshes, empty houses, and the shade of certain trees). The Jews had an elaborate, superstitious system about demons. For example, they believed that although demons were invisible, if one put ashes on the floor, in the morning the footprints of the demons could be seen in the form of chicken tracks.

Jesus returns to the topic of the demoniac and uses the incident to illustrate the increasing evil of the Jewish nation. This ex-demoniac needed to fill the void in his life or else even more demons might return to enjoy the newly refurbished abode. So also, the entire Jewish nation needed to fill its spiritual void with Christ. Cleansing by moral “rightness” is not sufficient. It may only entice the demons to hide under its ostensible pharisaic purity.

Mary Magdalene literally had seven demons cast from her (Lk 8:2). The Gerasene demoniac had a legion of demons in him. But the number seven here probably just represents complete wickedness. This is an analogy which should not be pressed too far.

§ 63**Jesus’ True Family**

(Mt 12:46-50;
Mk 3:31-35;
Lk 8:19-21)

Mark introduced the family of Jesus earlier (Mk 3:20-21). In between this family talk, he sandwiched¹³⁰ the accusation that Jesus drove out demons by Beelzebub. We understand then that Jesus was opposed on two fronts. Both his family and the religious hierarchy misunderstood him and accused him of being out of his mind.

Mt 12:46-48 *with*
Lk 8:19, Mk 3:31

⁴⁶While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. {But they were not able to get near him because of the crowd^{LK}} {[T]hey sent someone in to call him.^{Mk}} ⁴⁷Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”^a

⁴⁸He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”

Mk 3:34a

³⁴Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him . . .

Mt 12:49

⁴⁹Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers.

¹³⁰This is a common device Mark uses to arrange his narrative to make a particular point (cf. Mk 4:1-20; 5:21-43; 6:7-29; 11:12-25; 14:1-11; 14:53-72).

²¹⁴“My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.” Lk 8:21

^a[Mt 12:47] Some manuscripts do not have verse 47.

Jesus has four half-brothers: James, Joses, Judas and Simon (Mt 13:55). He also has sisters. They are concerned about Jesus. They have already appeared at the beginning of this narrative. They felt as if he had pushed himself a bit too far and gone crazy because he would not take the time to rest and eat (Mk 3:20-21). Jesus’ brothers, who do not believe in him yet (Jn 7:1-4; cf. 1 Cor 15:7), show up here possibly to ask Jesus to slow down and to beware of the building opposition of the Pharisees. We notice a conspicuous absence of Jesus’ father. Likely, Joseph was dead by now. Even so, God alone was Jesus’ father (cf. Mt 23:9). The rest of his family consisted of those faithful to God’s word.

Jesus is not disregarding his own family. Jews had deep respect for their parents. Rather, he is exalting those who hear and obey the word of God. “The old adage that ‘blood is thicker than water’ (originally intended to advocate that family ties are stronger than the ties of baptism into the spiritual family of God) is wrong!” (Butler, p. 140).

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.

²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people {from town after town¹³¹} stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying:

§ 64a
**The Setting of
 the Sermon in
 Parables**
 (Mt 13:1-3a;
 Mk 4:1-2;
 Lk 8:4)

This has been a busy day for Jesus:¹³¹ The healing of the blind, dumb demoniac and the subsequent discussion on the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (§ 61); the rejected request by the Pharisees that Jesus show them a sign from heaven (§ 62); Jesus’ rejection of his biological mother and brothers who sought to whisk him away (§ 63); and a slew of parables spoken on the shores of Galilee (§ 64). That evening he calmed the storm (§ 65) and, in the middle of the night, healed the Gerasene demoniac (§ 66).

This seashore is a familiar haunt for Jesus. Both the house and the boat were likely Peter’s. As we have seen before, Jesus uses the boat as a pulpit and the shore as a natural amphitheater for teaching the crowds. What’s different is Jesus’ preaching in parables. He has used them before (Mt 7:24-27; 9:16-17; 11:16-19; 12:29). But this time his whole sermon was simply a series of parables. This method will play a more dominant role in Jesus’ teaching from here on out. His parables will polarize his audiences, confusing some and delighting others.

¹³¹ The NIV is interpretive at this point. It inserts the word “same” in “that same day.” We agree with the interpretation but question its place in a translation.

Wenham offers a helpful analysis of Matthew's arrangement of the parables in this sermon (Mt 13).¹³²

- A. Sower — parable on those who hear the word of the kingdom.
- B. Disciples' question and Jesus' answer about the purpose of parables and the interpretation of the first parable.
- C. Tares — parable of kingdom on good and evil.
- D. Mustard seed and leaven — pair of parallel kingdom parables.
- E. Conclusion of crowd section and interpretation of tares.
- D'. Treasure and pearl — pair of parallel kingdom parables.
- C'. Dragnet — parable of kingdom on good and evil.
- B'. Jesus' question and disciples' answer about understanding parables.
- A'. Scribe — parable on those trained for the kingdom.



Before we begin an investigation of each individual parable we will examine Jesus' use and interpretation of parables.¹³³

1. Jesus employed the "stock metaphors" of rabbinic parables. Masters, fathers, and kings represent God. Servants and children represent God's people or his assistants. A harvest stands for judgment. A feast pictures the messianic banquet.
2. Jesus' parables were quite unlike the other rabbis in that (a) the concepts he taught were radically different and (b) he used them both to reveal and to conceal.
3. The Greek word *parabolē* and the Hebrew word *mashal* are used to signify a number of figures of speech which are not differentiated as precisely as we do in English. They represent, for instance: parable, similitude, allegory, fable, proverb, riddle, symbol, etc.
4. Jesus' parables were not merely for illustration, but often delivered the meat of the message.
5. Jesus' parables sprung at the audience from everyday life. In fact, Edersheim asserts that with each parable in this sermon, Jesus may well have pointed to the very objects used in the parable — a field, a woman baking, sprouting wheat, mustard plants, and dragnets.
6. There is often one main meaning given to each of the major characters or groups of characters in the parable.
7. This series of parables is "kingdom talk." The ideas are simple enough to the initiate. But to those disciples who do not grasp the spiritual nature of the kingdom, these thoughts are inscrutable.

Matthew and Mark inform us that this sermon is delivered off the shore of

¹³²D. Wenham, "The Structure of Matthew XIII," *NTS* 25 (1979): 517-518.

¹³³For a most helpful work on parables see C.L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990).

Galilee, likely near Capernaum. Jesus is in a boat a short distance from the shore. A large crowd stands on the bank. Where did all the people come from? Luke mentions that Jesus has just been on a tour. As a result, people from each of the towns and villages he visited have followed him back to Capernaum. They stand on the bank eager to hear still more of what this man has to say.

This first parable apparently serves as an introduction to the entire sermon just as the parable of the house owner (Mt 13:51-52) summarizes the whole sermon.¹³⁴ It is different from the others in that it does not contain the phrase: “The kingdom of heaven is like.” Thus, this parable sets the stage for hearing the other kingdom parables. Some, even in this crowd, are like the good soil and will be greatly blessed by this sermon. Others, for a variety of reasons, will not receive these parables. Consequently, they will wind up being confused by them.

§ 64b
The Parable
of the Soils
 (Mt 13:3b-23;
 Mk 4:3-25;
 Lk 8:5-18)



“A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, {it was trampled on^{LK}} and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root {no moisture^{LK}}. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up {with it^{LK}} and choked the plants {so that they did not bear grain^{Mk}}. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—{multiplying^{Mk}} a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. {When he said this, he called out:^{LK}} ⁹He who has ears, let him hear.”

Mt 13:3b-9 with
 Lk 8:5-7

In Jesus' agricultural society farmers would walk across their field with a sack of seed, grabbing handfuls and throwing them across the tilled ground. This was a very common picture in Palestine. While it may not be readily apparent to our Western minds, the sower was not particularly concerned with the kind of soil on which the seed fell. You see, we plow before we plant, thus we know what kind of soil we have. In Jesus' day, they often plowed after planting.¹³⁵ Thus, the road (hard soil) might become a fertile spot. And the rocky soil, which may not be visible now, would become apparent after the ground had been turned. Even if they plowed before planting, the farmer could afford to be generous in sowing seed because the more seed sown, the bigger the crop. He knows he's going to lose some seed on the edges of his field and near the rocky crags. But it's worth a handful of seed to ensure that every bit of good soil is covered.

There are four types of soils, each representing the condition of the human heart: First, the hard path. It is impenetrable. No seed can grow there, so the

¹³⁴ S.D. Toussaint, “The Introductory and Concluding Parables of Matthew Thirteen,” *BibSac* 121 (1964): 351-355.

¹³⁵ P.B. Payne, “The Order of Sowing and Plowing in the Parable of the Sower,” *NTS* 25 (1978): 123-129, explains the details of this agricultural peculiarity.

birds (Satan, cf. Mk 4:15), snatch it away. Second, there is shallow soil among the rocks. Matthew and Mark mention the plant's shallow roots; Luke mentions the lack of moisture. Anyone familiar with gardening realizes that there is no practical difference. It is the shallow soil which causes the lack of moisture. Third, the weeds grow up with the seed and choke it out. Fourth, there is good soil which produces an abundant crop. A good yield was tenfold. Jesus' hundredfold is a bit of an exaggeration, but by no means impossible. And it certainly grabs the attention of every gardener in the audience.

Concerning the third type of soil, it is incorrect to picture little seeds being thrown in the middle of a weed patch. The thorns, if any are left after the hot, dry summer, would be plowed under after the seed has been sown. The true picture is good seed competing with bad seed. Luke even uses the word *symplyō*, meaning "to grow up together." The implication is obvious. Our lives may look pure. Ostensibly we are in no danger of "bad weeds," but the seeds are there.

Essentially the soil is the same. The difference is what is added to the soil (i.e., weed seed, rocks, or a good trampling). How do these differences come about? Through hearing. Not the simple physiological performance of the ears, but the humble acceptance of the heart. The word of God must be obeyed and not just heard. In fact, in Hebrew culture, "to hear" also implied obedience. The soil is potentially good in each human heart. The difference is in the will. This is the meaning of the idiomatic phrase: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Mt 13:10-12 with
Mk 4:10-11,
Lk 8:18

¹⁰The disciples came to him {when he was alone, the Twelve and others around him^{Mk}} and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

¹¹He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. {To those on the outside everything is said in parables.^{Mk}} ¹²Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he {thinks he^{Lk}} has will be taken from him."

Jesus is teaching from a boat on the lake. The Twelve and a few close disciples are with him in the boat. When they see the bewildered looks among the crowds, they ask Jesus why he is confusing them with parables. This was not his normal style. They are able to ask him privately in the boat, even while Jesus is in front of a large crowd. Later he will leave the crowd and teach his disciples privately in the house (Mt 13:36).

This secret (mystery) of the kingdom is not something that needs to be figured out; it is something needing to be revealed. Once the mystery is revealed, it is easy enough to understand.

The principle of verse 12 applies to a number of areas. The more we listen, the more we are able to understand. The less we listen, the less we are able to understand. It is like money in the bank. The more money a person is able to save, the greater his ability to earn further. People go to a restaurant that is full, not one that is empty. We give responsibility to those who are responsible.

Likewise, those who understand the nature and purpose of the kingdom will be instructed by these parables. But those who are not “in the know” will be further confused and disillusioned by these parables.

^{13a}This is why I speak to them in parables:

‘Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand
{otherwise they might turn and be forgiven.’^{a Mk}}

Mt 13:13-17 with
Mk 4:12, Lk 8:18

¹⁴In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

¹⁵For this people’s heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.”^b

¹⁶But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.

¹⁷For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”

^a[Mk 4:12] Isaiah 6:9,10 ^b[Mt 13:15] Isaiah 6:9,10



The parable was the tool Jesus used to conceal the kingdom from many of his listeners. This quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10 is most accurately translated by the Greek in Mark 4:12. The Hebrew idiom might be rendered, “Seeing, they keep on seeing, but do not see; and hearing, they keep on hearing, but do not hear.” Mark also adds the important sentence, “Otherwise they might turn and be forgiven.” This doesn’t mean that no one in Jesus’ audience will ever come to Christ (Isa 6:13; Rom 11:25). It means for right now they are not able to accept the word of God through Jesus.

Thus, Jesus’ parables kept some from seeing the kingdom and repenting and being saved. Why would Jesus do that? From the context in Isaiah, it becomes obvious that this is a response to unbelief. As an individual turns his back on Jesus, Jesus turns his back on the individual through parables. This is a fulfillment of the biblical principle that unbelief not only brings about judgment, it also destroys a person’s ability to perceive truth (Jn 3:17-19; 9:39-41; Exod 8:32; 9:12; Rom 9:17-18; Acts 28:26-27; Mt 7:6; Lk 20:1-8; Jn 12:39-41; Rev 22:11).

Furthermore, this text from Isaiah 6:9-10 is used three times in the NT. Here the responsibility for their ignorance lies with the preacher. That is, Jesus hid the kingdom through parables. In John 12:40, the responsibility seems to be with God, who withdrew their opportunity for repentance. In Acts 28:26-27 the responsibility is laid at the feet of the audience. Underneath all of this is the word “hear” (used thirteen times in Mt 13:13-23). If the audience refuses to listen to God’s spokesman then their opportunity is taken away.

Does God ever reject anyone? Yes. But not whimsically. God’s rejection is

based on a number of things: (1) response to man's sin (Isa 6:8-13); (2) mutual rejection between God and man (Jn 3:17-19); (3) purging the remnant (Rom 11:5-8); (4) opening for the Gentiles (Rom 11:9ff); (5) the closed heart and ears of unrepentant people.

Matthew adds these important words of verses 16-17 which underscore our privilege of seeing the kingdom (cf. Lk 10:23-24; Heb 11:39-40; 1 Pet 1:10-12). We may be enamored with the excitement of the OT narratives, or even those of the Gospel. We might think they were pretty lucky to live in those phenomenal times. But we are, by far, more privileged than they. We enjoy the kingdom of God, the canonical Scriptures, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are the recipients of the deepest longing of the prophets.

Mk 4:13

¹³Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?"

Mt 13:18-23
with Mk 4:14,
Lk 8:12-15

¹⁸"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁴The farmer sows the word.^{Mk} ¹⁹When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one {Satan^{Mk}} {the devil^{Lk}} comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart {so that they may not believe and be saved^{Lk}}. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution {the time of testing^{Lk}} comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²²The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth {and pleasures^{Lk}} {and the desires for other things come in and^{Mk}} choke it {and they do not mature^{Lk}}, making it unfruitful. ²³But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man {with a noble and good heart^{Lk}} who hears the word and understands it {[and] accept[s] it.^{Mk}} He {by persevering^{Lk}} produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

We are fortunate that Jesus gave us his own interpretation of the parable. He will identify these four main types of people:

1. Path: People who have no desire for the word of God. It just can't penetrate. Satan snatches it away "So that they may not believe and be saved."
2. Rocks: People who fall through trouble or persecution. Matthew and Mark use the word "immediately" to describe both how this individual receives the word and how he falls away. These are flash-in-the-pan people. This individual is quickly willing to receive the word. But he is just as quick to drop it when it becomes a disadvantage to him.
3. Weeds: Choked out — Again, we remind our readers that the good seeds are in competition with the weed seeds. As they grow up together, the weeds win out. Jesus describes three areas which are so dangerous to the Christian: life's worries, life's riches and life's pleasures.
4. Good Soil: These are people who receive the word through hearing and obedience. And they produce a bumper crop!

Jesus gives us three requirements for fruit-bearing: (1) A pure and good heart. It is this prerequisite which allows the individual to listen to the word and not just hear it. (2) We must hold on to the Word for dear life. That is exactly what it is! (3) Perseverance. No one is truly saved who does not persevere (Mt 24:13; Rev 2:10). It's kind of like riding a bull in a rodeo. First you accept the challenge. Then you get a real good grip. And for better or for worse, you hang on 'til ya hear the bell.

{He said to them,^{Mk}} ¹⁶“No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. ¹⁷For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. {If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.^{Mk}} ¹⁸Therefore consider carefully how you listen. {With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more^{Mk}} Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”

**The Parable
of The Lamp**
(Mk 4:21-25;
Lk 8:16-18;
cf. Mt 5:14-16)



[Lk 8:16 = Mt 5:14-16, see comments on § 54c]

“Consider carefully how you listen” (lit. “watch how you listen” or “keep your eyes on your ears”). This is the crux of this passage. We get our light (or “produce” as in the previous parable) from listening to the word of Jesus, not just with our ears, but with our hearts. Jesus’ words shed light on our understanding of the kingdom.

²⁶He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. ²⁹As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

**§ 64c
The Parable
of the Seed’s
Spontaneous
Growth**
(Mk 4:26-29)



This parable, found only in Mark, naturally follows the parable of the soils. On the one hand, the soil (man) is responsible for receiving the seed (word of God). But on the other hand, God is responsible for its mysterious growth. Man must provide a climate in which God’s word can flourish. But in no way can we claim responsibility for its growth. In other words, we cultivate but God germinates. These parallel parables balance the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man.

Furthermore, this growth is mysterious. The kingdom of God is like the vegetable kingdom. It begins with a very small seed and grows perpetually (night and day), sometimes imperceptibly, culminating in a productive harvest.





§ 64d
The Parable
of the Weeds
 (Mt 13:24-30)

²⁴Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷“The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

²⁸“‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

²⁹“‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

Such vicious agricultural sabotage was rare but not unrealistic.¹³⁶ If someone did want to be so vindictive, they could have used a weed seed called darnel (Gk = *zizania*). It looked so much like wheat that you could never tell the difference until the plant was full grown and starting to “head” out. At that point it was too late to weed them out because the roots would already have intertwined. Thus, by pulling out the weeds you would also root out the wheat.

The only solution, then, was to wait until the harvest. Both plants would be cut down and then could be separated. The weeds would be bundled up and burned. The wheat would be harvested and stored in barns. Likewise, the good and evil of this world are allowed to coexist. By destroying the wicked, many good people would get caught in the crossfire.

There will come a day, however, when all the evil is rooted out. Only the good will remain. The kingdom of God will be fully manifest. But for now, we must live with this uncomfortable mix of God’s kingdom in a fallen world.

Some have used this verse in relation to church discipline.¹³⁷ That is, we should not attempt to ferret wicked people out of the church. But the field full of weeds in this parable is not the church, but the world. Furthermore, the New Testament is clear that the church does, in fact, have an obligation to discipline its erring members.



§ 64e
The Parable of
the Mustard
Seed
 (Mt 13:31-32;
 Mk 4:30-32;
 cf. Lk 13:18-19)

³⁰Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God {heaven^{MT}} is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. ³²Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade {branches^{MT,LK}}.”

Mark places this parable right next to the parable of the seed’s spontaneous growth (§ 64c). Indeed, these two are related to one another. Not only does the seed grow spontaneously (by God’s

¹³⁶A.J. Kerr, “Matthew 13:25. Sowing Zizania among Another’s Wheat: Realistic or Artificial?” *JTS*

influence), but it grows tremendously large in comparison with its small beginning. Likewise, the kingdom of God, which may now look insignificant, will grow and expand. From its humble beginnings of Jesus and the Twelve, this kingdom has made an impressive impact on the globe.

The mustard seed is not actually the smallest seed in the world (that would be the black orchid).¹³⁸ But it was proverbially famous for how little it was and how tall it grew. Some mustard plants, in fact, reached ten to twelve feet. That's big enough for little birds to perch on, hence it is like a tree.¹³⁹

Some have allegorized the birds and the shade as foreign nations resting in the kingdom of God (cf. Ezek 17:22-24; Dan 4:12).¹⁴⁰ While this is probably overextending the meaning of the parable, it is clear, historically, that the kingdom of God has had broad impact and benefit in this world.

³³He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount^a of flour until it worked all through the dough."

^a33 Greek *three satas* (probably about 1/2 bushel or 22 liters)

Just as the small seed of mustard grows into a large shrub, so also the small amount of leaven permeates a large lump of dough.¹⁴¹ Like leaven, the influence of the kingdom, which is now small, will soon permeate far beyond its humble beginnings. Leaven is often used in the Scriptures to represent a negative influence, but not always (Lev 7:13-14; 23:17). In this context it certainly represents the positive influence of the kingdom.

³³With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

§ 64f
The Parable of Leaven
(Mt 13:33-35;
Mk 4:33-34;
cf. Lk 13:20-21)

Mk 4:33

48/1 (1997): 108-109, cites Roman law which alludes to this very offense. Those who deny the historicity of Jesus' example are simply unaware of the legal realities of the day.

¹³⁷For a cogent argument of this, see R. McIver, "The Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat (Mt 13:24-30, 36-43) and the Relationship between the Kingdom and the Church as Portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew," *JBL* 114/4 (1995): 643-659. Among the difficulties for the universalist interpretation of this parable he cites: (1) Why would Jesus say there will be wicked people in the world until the judgment? Is that not a tautology? (2) Why would the disciples think they could or should root the wicked out of the field if, in fact, the field is the world? (3) If the field is the world, then why are the crops indistinguishable? Should Christians not be visibly different?

¹³⁸J.A. Sproule, "The Problem of the Mustard Seed," *GTJ* 1 (1980): 37-42, analyzes Jesus' figurative language at this point.

¹³⁹The word Jesus used, *laxanon*, means an edible plant or a vegetable, not actually a tree (Mt, Lk) or even a shrub. And, in fact, the mustard seed was the smallest variety of *laxanon* in Palestine at the time.

¹⁴⁰E.g., R.W. Funk, "The Looking-Glass Tree Is for the Birds," *Int* 27 (1973): 3-9.

¹⁴¹Three *satas* would come out to about 20-45 liters. That's enough bread to feed 100 people.



³⁵So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:

"I will open my mouth in parables,

I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."^a

^a35 Psalm 78:2

This sermon is composed entirely of parables. It leaves most of Jesus' audience bewildered (Mt 13:10-17). In fact, Jesus has to explain these parables privately to his disciples, once they get back into the house.

Matthew, characteristically, employs this OT quote from Asaph. He is not necessarily presenting Psalm 78:2 as predictive prophecy. Rather, he is saying that Jesus typifies the teachings of ancient Israel. Just as Asaph recounted the great deeds of God in cryptic language, so now Jesus reveals the great kingdom of God through veiled speech.



§ 64g
The Parable
of Weeds
Explained
(Mt 13:36-43)

³⁶Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

³⁷He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the

age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴²They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."



Jesus leaves the crowd and goes into the house (cf. Mt 13:1). His interpretation of this parable is enlightening. Not only do we learn the meaning of the parable, but also, Jesus' method of interpretation. We notice first, that Jesus uses "harvest" as the normal Jewish metaphor for judgment. Thus, Jesus was understandable to his contemporaries through stock metaphors. Second, Jesus demonstrates a literal belief in Satan, judgment, the end of the age, and hell. Third, Jesus' interpretation is allegorical. That is, he gives a specific meaning to each of the major elements of the parable. It was neither wild nor whimsical, but it was admittedly allegorical.



§ 64h
The Parable
of the Hidden
Treasure
(Mt 13:44)

⁴⁴"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."

Because there were no bank vaults which could keep money safe for the general public, the rich built guarded storehouses, while the common man had to hide his wealth the best he could. If he suddenly died, then his treasure would just have to wait for someone to find it.

Strictly speaking, a hidden treasure would rightfully belong to the owner of the field. Some have called into question the morality of recovering a treasure and then buying the field. But this is not the point of the parable.¹⁴² Jesus isn't beyond using scalawags to illustrate a valuable spiritual truth (cf. Lk 16:1-8; 18:1-8). The point is, the kingdom of heaven is of great value. Like a treasure, it's worth everything we might have to sacrifice to obtain it.



^{45a}Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

§ 64i
The Parable of the Precious Pearl
(Mt 13:45-46)



The message of this parable is the same as the last — the ultimate value of the kingdom. It is worth giving up everything else to obtain. The difference is that the merchant deliberately searched for the pearl of great price. The man in the field just stumbled upon it. Whether we search for God, like Cornelius (Acts 10), or whether we stumble upon him, like the woman at the well (Jn 4), it is worth whatever we sacrifice in order to obtain its treasures. Jesus calls every disciple to rid himself of whatever stands in his way of following. Sometimes it is money (Mt 19:21), but it is always total sacrifice. "Paradoxically, salvation is free, yet costs everything."¹⁴³

^{47a}Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

§ 64j
The Parable of the Dragnet
(Mt 13:47-50)



This net [*sagēnē*] was not the throw net normally used by fishermen. It was a dragnet that was let down in back of the boat. As it moved along,

¹⁴²P.S. Hawkins, "Parable as Metaphor," *CSR* 12 (1983): 226-236, says that the dishonest deal was, in fact, the crux of the parable. In his own words, the main point of the parable is this: "God works to realize his purpose even through persons and circumstances as dubious as the ones we find here." However, in response, J.W. Sider, "Interpreting the Hid Treasure," *CSR* 13 (1984): 360-372, argues persuasively that the dishonest activity of the man who found the treasure is an incidental detail and should not be factored into the interpretation. There is no such element in the parallel parable of the pearl of great price. Where ethics are central to other parables, the details are specified and dramatized.

¹⁴³F. Stagg, *Matthew in The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8 (Nashville: Broadman, 1969), p. 159. M. Bailey, "The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and of the Pearl Merchant," *BibSac* 156 (April-June 1999): 175-189, rightly points out the juxtaposition in these two parables of Grace and Demand.

¹⁴⁴Literally "all nationalities." This is a strange way of talking about fish, but perfectly natural in talking about men. Even this early in Jesus' ministry, he suggests that he will be a global, not a national, Messiah.

it caught all kinds¹⁴⁴ of fish. Only when they are back on shore will they separate the good from the bad, the big from the small.



This parable is much like the wheat and the tares. Both talk about the mixture of the righteous and the wicked and the separating judgment that will take place at the end of the age. Jesus interprets both of them for his audience and puts a P.S. on both about the nature of hell (Mt 13:42, 50). The difference is that the parable of the tares emphasizes the waiting while the parable of the dragnet emphasizes the dividing.



§ 64k
The Parable
of New and
Old Treasure
(Mt 13:51-53)

⁵¹“Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked.

“Yes,” they replied.

⁵²He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

⁵³When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there.

When Jesus asks the disciples if they understand these parables, we should probably insert the word “better.” It is not likely that they understand their full impact. But since they claim to understand them (better), they become responsible for teaching the truths of the kingdom. As the scribes had received pharisaic instruction, so the disciples of Jesus have been taught (lit., disciplined) in the finer points of the kingdom.

As teachers of the kingdom, it is their responsibility to bring out both the new and the old. As a rich man might decorate his mansion with antiques as well as modern art, so the teacher is to explain and apply both the ancient truths and current developments. These disciples are to show how Jesus fulfilled God’s ancient plan at the present time.



After a very full day of teaching, Jesus gets into a boat and leaves Capernaum, heading to the district of the Gadarenes. What have we learned, then, from these kingdom parables?

1. The kingdom is like a wheat field. Its growth is based both on the reception of man (§ 64b) and the sovereignty of God (§ 64c).
2. The division of the righteous and the wicked will not take place until the judgment (§ 64d & j).
3. The kingdom grows and influences phenomenally (§ 64e & f).
4. The kingdom is of ultimate value (§ 64h, i, k).

§ 65
Calming the Storm
(Mt 8:18, 23-27;¹⁴⁵
Mk 4:35-41;
Lk 8:22-25)

This is a powerful and important narrative. It is the first time in the Synoptics that Jesus’ power acted upon the

¹⁴⁵Matthew takes this pericope out of its chronological order and places it