



PART NINE

The Later Perean Ministry

⁴⁰Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. Here he stayed ⁴¹and many people came to him. They said, “Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true.” ⁴²And in that place many believed in Jesus.

After a second near-stoning in Jerusalem at the Feast of Dedication (Jn 10:31-33), Jesus eludes his would-be assassins and escapes to Perea on the east side of Jordan. This territory was in Herod Antipas' jurisdiction. Thus the Jerusalem leaders would not legally be able to arrest him. Besides, the locals have an enduring affection for John the Baptist which was naturally transferred to Jesus, especially after his benevolent miracles. Thus Jesus was safe among the crowds.

§ 112
**Jesus Moves
from Jerusalem
to Perea**
(Jn 10:40-42)

We have interrupted Luke's flow of thought by inserting John 10:22-42 between Luke 13:21 & 22. While that's helpful for a harmony, we must also pay attention to Luke's context. Reading Luke alone, this question, “Will many people or few enter the kingdom?” naturally follows on the heels of Jesus' teaching about the expansion of the kingdom of God. On the one hand, it looks big. But on the other hand, it's hard to get in (cf. Mt 7:13-23).

§ 113a
**Question about
Entering the
Kingdom**
(Lk 13:22-30)



²²Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ²³Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”

Lk 13:22-25a

He said to them, ²⁴“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’”

Luke says that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. But we learn from John that he just escaped from there. Furthermore, it will be another three months before he returns. Thus we read Luke to say, “Jesus' mind and heart are pointed decisively in Jerusalem's direction” (cf. Lk 9:51; 13:33-34; 17:11; 19:28, 41).

During Jesus' itinerant preaching tour of Perea, someone asks this simple and logical question: Are few or many going to be saved? The rabbis' opinions differed. Even Jesus gives a yes/no answer. Yes, few are going to enter because the gate is narrow (vv. 24-28). On the other hand, many will be saved (vv. 28-30). It seems that few Jews will be saved, but many Gentiles (cf. Rom 11:11-15). Perhaps Jesus is reiterating what he has taught in parables. That is, the kingdom starts small but multiplies immensely (Lk 13:18-21; cf. § 64e, 64f).

Entering through the narrow gate is no easy task. The Greek word for "make every effort" is *agonizō*, from which we get the word "agonize." It was used to describe the extra effort a person exerts when involved in an athletic contest or a fight. Getting into the kingdom is tough. Jesus never promised that we could waltz right in! It requires effort, struggle and persistence. We need to think clearly about Jesus' preaching on salvation. It is a gift that we cannot merit; it is NOT a gift that is free or easy. Many will stand outside the door once it has been shut only to be utterly disappointed that (s)he did not make the effort to enter when the gettin' was good (cf. Mt 7:13-23). Jesus is that narrow door, not because he is narrow minded, but because he is the only way to the Father (Jn 14:6).

It almost sounds like some people will try to get in but just not have what it takes. That is NOT what Jesus is saying. He means that there is a time for repentance. If you wait too long, it may be too late. In fact, closing the door may be a symbol of death. While there is life, the opportunity is generally open. Once a person dies, the door is closed forever (Heb 9:27). Many will appeal to God to let them in after it is too late, perhaps even after their death. But the time for repentance will be over.

Lk 13:25b-27

"But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'
²⁶"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'

²⁷"But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'

We enter the kingdom, not by deeds, but through relationship with Jesus. When Jesus says, "I don't know you or where you come from" he is saying, "I don't have a relationship with you or even with your family."¹ That was a powerful sentiment in Jewish ears. Only family members will have the door opened to them.

It is not as if these people are total strangers. They know the master of the house. The practice of eating and drinking was a significant gesture in their culture. There was a certain bonding attached to it. In addition, the master of the house had taught in their streets. They had achieved a certain level of relation-

¹ Packett suggests that we change the punctuation from "*Ouk oida humas, pothen este*" ("I don't know you, where you are from") to "*Ouk oida humas. Pothen este?*" ("I don't know you. Where are you from?") This has the advantage of smoothing a somewhat awkward phrase and making a nice transition into vv. 26-27 (E. B. Packett, "Luke 13:25" *ExpT* 67 [1955-56]: 178).

ship and were counting on that to get them into the house. Again, the door is only opened to family. In a parallel passage, Matthew 7:21-23, they relied on their works. They claimed to be servants. Here they claim to be friends. However, only family will be allowed in.

Everyone but “family” will be “sent away” [*apostete*]. In its noun form this word is translated “apostasy.” It is the utter renouncing of someone or something. In other words, the owner of the house will have nothing to do with them. Why? Because they were lackadaisical? Because they missed the boat? NO! Because they were “workers of unrighteousness.” Those who do not enter the kingdom have a sin problem, not a time-management problem. So they committed some heinous crime? Yes! They rejected Jesus. In the eyes of any father, rejection of his son is the greatest possible offence.

²⁸^aThere will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

Lk 13:28-30

The theme of family relationship continues in v. 28. None of these past heroes were perfect. In fact, some of them were not even very good. But they all trusted God for their salvation rather than their own works. The picture here is of the Messianic banquet so hoped for by the Jews. For them, the only thing worse than missing this Messianic banquet was to peer through the windows to see their spot filled by a profane Gentile. This would be a painful portrait for these Palestinian Jews (on “weeping and gnashing of teeth” see Mt 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

Here we find the second answer to the man’s questions: Will many or few be saved? Many! They will come from all parts of the earth. This was prophesied numerous times (Isa 2:2; 19:16-24; 25:6-12; 60:8-14; 66:18-24; Hos 1:10-11; Zech 14:16-21). The Jews rejected their own Messiah. The Gentiles flocked to him.

The last (Gentiles) will be first (above the Jews).² This was one of Jesus’ favorite sayings. In all contexts it deals with God’s economy versus man’s. People prioritize things differently than God. We honor visible, tangible works. God honors a pure heart and a true family relationship. We will be surprised at the judgment when God strips us all of our deeds and ostensible armor of false righteousness. We will stand with Jesus alone or we will stand outside the door . . . alone.

²The Gentiles were last in rank. That is, they were viewed as unclean. Moreover, they were the last to receive the gospel. Throughout the book of Acts the Jews were always the first to hear. Because they rejected Jesus, their seats at the Messianic banquet were filled by Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 19:8-9; 28:28).

§ 113b
The Pharisees
Warn Jesus
about Herod
(Lk 13:31-35)

³¹At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, “Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.”
³²He replied, “Go tell that fox, ‘I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’ ³³In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!”

Herod Antipas was a sad case (see notes on § 71 a-b). He's the one who executed John the Baptist. And it looks here like he has his sights set on Jesus. After all, both men are part of the same movement (Lk 9:9). He is even convinced that Jesus is some kind of “reincarnation” of John (Mt 14:1-2). To make matters worse, Jesus is more popular than John ever was. In fact, some members of Herod's own court are following him (Lk 8:3; cf. Acts 13:1). It's not surprising that Herod tries to catch up with Jesus (Lk 9:9; 23:7-12).³ If he does, it will spell certain death for Jesus. Now, Jesus is not afraid to die. That's why he came. But it must be in Jerusalem, not Machaerus.

Herod was not popular among the Jews. The Pharisees especially hated him. In fact, they even hated his supporters, the Herodians. But more than Herod and his cronies, the Pharisees hated Jesus (Lk 5:17, 21, 30; 6:2, 7; 7:30; 11:38-54; 14:1-6). That's why they aligned with these strange bedfellows (Mt 22:14-16; Mk 3:6). The two groups worked together to eliminate this pest. That being the case, why in the world would the Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod was about to get him? Perhaps these are good Pharisees, not the bad ones who aligned with Herod. There are, after all, some noble Pharisees (e.g., Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Gamaliel). But it is unlikely that they are numerous enough or bold enough at this late stage in Jesus' ministry to warn him about Herod.

More likely, this is part of their game plan. Although Luke does not charge them with deception, it seems likely that they have ulterior motivations for trying to get Jesus to leave. First, they are losing the battle in Perea. People are following Jesus in droves and the longer he stays in the area the worse it gets. Second, they want him in Jerusalem. Jesus seems to have a stronger hold in Galilee and Perea than he has in Judea. And the Pharisees have a stronger hold in Judea, especially in the capital, Jerusalem. They almost got him last time. With one more shot, they just might get their man.

Jesus knows what they are really saying. He sees their hearts. That is precisely why he responds the way he does. He calls Herod a fox. In the OT a fox indicated a small, insignificant schemer (Neh 4:3; S of S 2:15). Furthermore, Jesus uses the feminine “she-fox.” Many believe that he was exposing Herod's wife as the mover and shaker behind his schemes. Jesus obviously is not intimidated by this insignificant, henpecked schemer. To make matters worse, Herod, as a king, should have been identified as a lion. To call him a fox instead is to question the validity of his reign.⁴

³J.B. Tyson, “Jesus and Herod Antipas,” *JBL* 79 (1960): 239-246, traces Herod's pursuit of Jesus.

⁴E.A. Hermanson, “Kings Are Lions, but Herod Is a Fox: Translating the Metaphor in Luke 13:22,” *BT* 50/2 (1999): 235-240.

Jesus understands, with impressive clarity, the sovereignty of God. His steps are ordained. Herod is hardly going to thwart God's plans! And Jesus is hardly going to be derailed by petty threats.⁵ We would do well to learn this lesson. God is in control. We, as his people, rest in his hand. If we are obedient, we find ourselves in his protection. As with Jesus, this does not mean that we will never be harmed. But God's plans will never be thwarted in the lives of his obedient children.

The Pharisees must feel naked when Jesus talks about dying at Jerusalem. He reveals their shameful desires. He admits his own destiny of destruction. You would think he would feel sorry for himself. But his grief is poured out on Jerusalem. All the beauty of Zion, the hope and aspirations of Jerusalem are embodied in this man standing before them. Yet they eagerly hasten him to Jerusalem, the executioner's house.

³⁴"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!
³⁵Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'^a"

^a35 Psalm 118:26

Here is utter pathos.⁶ Matthew (23:37-39) will repeat these same words just a few days before Jesus' death. Matthew also gives a fuller account of their killing of the prophets (23:29-36). True to form and history, Jerusalem rejects its Christ, nails him to a cross, washes its hands and says, "There, now we shall have some peace!" Little do they know the impending doom which they have brought upon themselves (v. 35).

Jerusalem⁷ will be left "desolate" (lit., abandoned, empty). This carries two implications. First, Jesus is their Messiah. When they kill him, there is no other in which to hope.⁸ Second, within one generation, the city will pay for their heinous crime against the Son of God (Mt 24:1ff.; Lk 19:41-44; 21:20-24). In A.D. 70 the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem and tore it down stone by stone, but not before internal strife had ripped her to pieces. Factions and civil

⁵ "Three days" undoubtedly reminded Luke's readers of the resurrection. But it probably means nothing more than a short period of time.

⁶This is the first of four instances that Luke records where Jesus weeps over Jerusalem (13:31-35; 19:41-44; 21:20-24; 23:27-31).

⁷The word "Jerusalem" is used three times in a row. That is a powerful repetition (*epizeuxis*).

⁸K. Baltzer, "The Meaning of the Temple," *HTR* 58 (1965): 263-277, argues that "house" should be understood as temple. After all, *oikos* is the most common word in the LXX for temple. And while Luke usually uses *hieron*, when his material parallels Mt or Mk he uses *oikos* for temple (6:4; 19:46). Furthermore, he suggests that Jesus embodies the *shekinah* glory of God (Lk 9:28-36; Acts 7:55; 9:3-5). Hence, when Jesus leaves the temple (or is rejected by God's people), the glory [*kabod*] of God has departed. In other words, when Jesus leaves the house (i.e., temple), so does their God.

war within, the Roman armies without, the city of Jerusalem had never before, nor since, experienced such horror and devastation.

Jesus says that they will not see him again until they cry, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Ps 118:26). In three months the crowds outside of Jerusalem will shout these very words, welcoming Jesus at the triumphal entry. But even after that Jesus repeats this prophecy (Mt 23:37-39). In other words, it is not yet fulfilled at the triumphal entry. Should we look figuratively to 70 A.D. when Jesus comes in judgment against the city? That hardly fits the jubilant tone of their declaration. Thus we conclude that this must ultimately refer to his Second Coming, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord (Phil 2:9-11; Mt 24:30-31; Rev 1:7). Perhaps this may even suggest the salvation of many Jews (Rom 11:25-27) who jubilantly receive Jesus at his Second Coming.⁹

§ 114
Dinner with a
Pharisee and
Healing of
Dropsy
 (Lk 14:1-24)¹⁰

This is the last of three times that Jesus ate with a Pharisee (Lk 7:36; 11:37; 14:1). The first time it ended in a fight when Jesus allowed the sinful woman to anoint his feet. The second time it ended in a fight because Jesus neglected to wash his hands before he ate. So we are not too terribly surprised that this meal ends with Jesus thrashing both the host and his guests over their self-seeking seating charts.¹¹



Lk 14:1-6

¹One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. ²There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. ³Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” ⁴But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.

⁹D.C. Allison, “Mt 23:39 = Lk 13:35b as a Conditional Prophecy,” *JSNT* 18 (1983): 75-84, points out that in the context of Ps 118:26 these words are jubilant praise, but in the context of Mt 23:39 and Lk 13:35 they spell doom. How shall we handle this paradox? He suggests that the text does not mean, “When the Messiah comes the people will bless him,” but “When Israel blesses him, the Messiah will come.” He defends this passage as conditional prophecy by several supporting evidences: (a) The Jews did believe the coming of Messiah was contingent on their purity and/or repentance. (b) *Heos* often sets up a contingent Greek sentence. (c) This structure seems to be consistent in Rabbinic literature for conditional sentences. (d) This respects both the promised salvation of Ps 118 as well as the context of judgment in Mt 23 and Lk 13. (e) Acts 3:19-21 and 2 Peter 3:11-12 both allude to ushering in the coming of Christ.

¹⁰Lk 13 and 14 should probably be read as twin towers of controversy with the Pharisees. There are significant parallels: (a) 13:10-17 & 14:1-6 are Sabbath healings. (b) 13:22-30 & 14:15-24 describe who makes it into the kingdom. (c) 13:31-35 & 14:25-35 present the suffering of Jesus, Jerusalem and the disciple.

¹¹J.T. Carroll, “Luke’s Portrayal of the Pharisees,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 604-621, traces the evolution of Jesus’ controversy with the Pharisees. While there were always some Pharisees who supported Jesus and his followers (e.g., Jn 3:1-2; Acts 5:33-40; 23:6-10), according to Luke, things went from luke-warm to red-hot, especially during Jesus’ final trek to Jerusalem (Lk 5:21, 26; 6:1-11; 7:29-30, 36-50; 11:37-54; 12:1; 14:1-6, 7-11, 12-14, 15-24; 15:1-2; 16:14-31; 17:20-21; 18:9-14).

⁵Then he asked them, “If one of you has a son^a or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?” ⁶And they had nothing to say.

^aSome manuscripts *donkey*

Luke prepares his readers for the impending bout by noting two details. First, the banquet is in the home of a *prominent* Pharisee, literally, “One of the rulers of the Pharisees.” Quite possibly he is a member of the Sanhedrin or perhaps the ruler of the synagogue in which they had worshiped that Saturday. Second, it takes place on a Sabbath. That has spelled trouble before (cf. § 50-52, 100c, 110).

We don’t know the motives of this prominent Pharisee (whether he was benevolent or malevolent toward Jesus). But the result of his invitation is that Jesus is carefully scrutinized by the whole group of Pharisees. This word for “carefully watched” is used two other times by Luke (6:7, 20:20). Both times it describes the Pharisees trying to catch Jesus doing something wrong.

There in the crowd is a man with dropsy. Today this disease is called edema. Simply put, the guy is retaining water. It sounds benign enough. But edema often indicates a heart or liver disorder. Depending on the cause, edema can be curable, but other times it is fatal. Either way, he looks pathetic.

Why is he at the feast? He may have been planted in the crowd to cause another controversy (cf. Lk 5:17; 6:7). More likely, however, he is just one of the many sick people who followed Jesus hoping to be healed. While the spectators gather in the courtyard to gawk at this sumptuous feast, this fellow gets swept in with them.

The question Jesus asks is so simple (v. 3). The answer is so obvious! Yet the Pharisees keep silent. They want Jesus to break the traditions by healing (cf. § 51 & 110). But now they are in a catch-22. They can’t say it’s lawful to heal on the Sabbath. They would have nothing to pin on Jesus and they would contradict their own traditions. But neither can they say it’s unlawful. That would contradict logic, compassion and all that is good and just. It would expose their hypocrisy and their devotees might just convert to following Jesus. Their solution is silence.

Jesus’ response is to heal the fellow right in their face. Feathers are about to fly. Jesus doesn’t want this guy caught in the cross fire (cf. Jn 5:1-18; 9:1-34). So he sends him away. Then he turns to deal with the Pharisees. He reminds them that they also heal on the Sabbath. If they would save a son or an ox, certainly Jesus can save this man with dropsy.¹² The clear difference is that the Pharisees will only do what is necessary to save a life on the Sabbath.¹³ Jesus goes beyond this by providing healing on the Sabbath which could have waited

¹²Some manuscripts have “ass” instead of “son.”

¹³In the Dead Sea Scrolls, “Cairo Damascus Covenant” 11:13-15, it was forbidden by the Qumran sect to give help to an animal on the Sabbath, either in birth or by pulling it out of a ditch. It was allowed, however, in both the OT and the rabbinic law (*Shabbath* 128b).

until Sunday. Therein lies the rub. Jesus clearly and purposely breaks their Sabbath traditions in favor of God's greater concern for mercy and compassion.

Jesus' logic overpowers them. The phrase, "They had nothing to say" is literally, "They were not able to answer against these things." They are not tongue-tied, they are hog-tied. They know they have been outwitted. They want to contradict Jesus in the worst way, but they are thoroughly unable to do so.

Lk 14:7-11

⁷When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. ¹¹For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Jewish banquet was laid out across a horseshoe shaped table which was about six inches off the ground. Around the table were cushions or low couches on which three men could recline. The host sat at the top of the "horseshoe." The place of honor was at his right hand and the number two seat was at his left. This seating chart went back and forth across the table to the lowest "seat."

There was a very definite pecking order in these feasts. You might get away with sliding up a spot or two. But if you got too audacious, the host would have to ask you to give way to his more prominent guest. That would be embarrassing.

These men are like children arguing over who gets to sit in the front seat of the car. It is ridiculous, selfish and arrogant. Jesus' attention is riveted on this ludicrous scene of grown men fighting for positions on cushions.¹⁴ He says, "Don't take the best seat you can get. Take the lowest seat." That is good advice not only spiritually but socially (cf. Prov 25:6-7). Instead of being singled out for demotion, you will be singled out for promotion. The result of self-humiliation is often public acclamation.

Jesus is not just talking about banquet etiquette. This rule applies to every arena of our lives, from parking places to company parties. If we act arrogantly, God will surely bring someone along to put us in our place. We may get away with a little bit for a little while, but eventually, this childish self-seeking will be the cause of great embarrassment.

The converse is also true. If we humble ourselves by taking a lower position we will eventually be properly recognized among our peers. The secret is really in letting someone else recognize you rather than promoting and exalting yourself.

God's economy is not only different than ours, it is often opposite of ours. And when life is over, God will turn the totem pole upside down. Those who

¹⁴Luke uses an imperfect verb, indicating that this scene continued for some time. Jesus "was noticing" (*epechō*, meaning "to latch onto").

were on the top will be on the bottom and those on the bottom will be on the top. God is able to do this because he judges the heart whereas we are only able to judge appearance and performance. God knows the depths of a person, whether his motive is pure or poor.

¹²Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

This next bit of advice is directed to the host. In essence, it is the same as the advice to the guests. Instead of being ostentatious and self-seeking, be humble and giving. How? “Stop continually inviting”¹⁵ important people to your parties. Now there is nothing wrong with having friends or relatives over for dinner. But if they are the only ones you ever invite, you have a problem. A tremendous amount of money was spent on these banquets. It was spent on people who could provide for themselves. Those who really needed it never got invited.

We all recognize the importance of investments. If we spend all our money now, we won’t have any to enjoy later. Giving to the poor is really an investment. We are choosing to forego the enjoyment of recognition by our peers so that we will be recognized by God. He will reward well at the resurrection.

¹⁵When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

Lk 14:15-20

¹⁶Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

¹⁸But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’

¹⁹Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

²⁰Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’



Jesus has just finished talking about the believer’s reward at the resurrection of the righteous (v. 14). This naturally triggers one pious Pharisee to think about the Messianic banquet (Isa 25:6-12; 65:13-16). This fellow is on target. Unfortunately, many of those around the table are not going to share in the Messianic feast (cf. 13:28-30); not because they are not invited, but because they refuse to come when they are invited. Jesus’ rebuke comes in the form of a parable. He’ll tell this story again the Tuesday before he dies (Mt 22:1-14). It will have a slightly different emphasis and a few differing details. But the punch line is the same.

¹⁵That is the implication of the Greek present imperative.

God is giving a banquet for his Son Jesus. The invitations are extended far and wide announcing the upcoming feast (v. 16). Once the meal is prepared, a second invitation is sent (v. 17): “Come with haste to the celebration.” Everybody who’s anybody is invited — all the rich and famous. (Figuratively this symbolizes the Jews.) But they reject it unanimously [*apo mias*]. With one accord they send the servant away.

Three excuses are given.¹⁶ The first two are similar. What idiot would buy a piece of property without first checking it out?! The fact is, both of these men have already checked out their purchases. They are using them as excuses not to come. To make matters worse, this is an evening banquet, which started at sundown. They could not have checked out their purchases in the dark. This makes their excuses even more feeble and offensive. The third fellow seems to have a valid excuse. He just got married and wants to spend time with his wife. Normally, these feasts were not integrated, and so these newlyweds could not be together. Deuteronomy 24:5 offers some support for his excuse. There it says that a newly married man is exempt from military service for a year so that he can stay at home and please his wife (see also 1 Cor 7:33). His excuse is the most valid; yet it is also the most curt.

Lk 14:21-24

²¹“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

²²“Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

²³“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

The Jews reject their own Messiah, so salvation goes out to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 28:28; Rom 11:1-24). In the parable there is a sense of urgency about the invitation — the food is getting cold. Obviously, the Messianic banquet is not getting cold or stale, but there is still an urgency about this invitation. God has mapped out the span of this age. As the divine clock winds down, our opportunity to invite others in grows thin. Furthermore, each man’s days are numbered. If a person does not come quickly, the opportunity to respond may very well be squandered.

Therefore, the servants are sent everywhere. Four different words are used for road. The first two in v. 21 indicate two types of city streets. The second two in v. 23 indicate country roads. The streets were broad and wide, the alleys were narrow, and the country lanes (v. 23) were simply shrubs or fences in which vagabonds found shelter. In other words, they were to scour the streets for guests.

They were to invite everyone — the poor, crippled, blind and lame. Some of these would have been excluded from full participation in Jewish worship

¹⁶The word “make excuses” can also mean, “To shun, reject, or refuse.”

because of their physical imperfections. This makes the invitation all the more precious. The master, intent on filling the banquet hall in honor of his son, sends the servants out for yet another round. Only this time the servants are not merely *inviting* people, they were to “*make them* come.” The servant, of course, could not physically force someone to come. But he could emphasize the urgency and importance of the invitation. Likewise, we as evangelists need to express the urgency of the invitation to come to Jesus. There is a great celebration awaiting those who do.

This parable weaves together the sovereignty of God and the response of men. We see that our coming to Christ was not due to our own cleverness, perception, or worthiness. We were called by God and compelled through his servants. On the other hand, some will be excluded because of their callous rejection. In response, God hardens their hearts as a sovereign act of judgment (v. 24, Isa 6:9-10; Mt 13:15; Jn 12:40; Acts 28:26-27; Rom 11:1-24). Then it is too late to come.

In these days of equal rights and extreme materialism, it is difficult to speak of the radical costs of being a disciple of Jesus. We have confused free grace with cheap works. True enough, we cannot earn salvation as if we were twisting God’s arm with good deeds. At the same time, salvation is not free! It costs us our family, our marriage, our children, our possessions, our position, our time. Nothing short of everything is acceptable.

§ 115
Counting the
Cost of
Discipleship
(Lk 14:25-35)

²⁵Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

[vv. 25-27 = Mt 10:37-38, see comments on § 70b; also Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23]

The big blowout at the Pharisee’s house (§ 114) attracts a good bit of attention, resulting in yet another huge crowd. That is just what happened the last time Jesus ate with a Pharisee (Lk 12:1). Because these feasts were semi-public, and Jesus’ feast speeches were so pointed, they stirred up community interest.

As this entourage moves along, Jesus suddenly, and even heatedly, turns on the crowd. This stern admonition is a reaction to the shallow admiration of the crowd. Still today Jesus has many fans but few advocates. It is popular to talk about him in a semi-scholastic way, or to follow, to a minimal extent, the Judeo-Christian ethic. It is quite another thing, however, to be a true disciple. Jesus explains the difference.

To be a disciple demands total allegiance. We must love Jesus more than even our families.¹⁷ “Hate” is obviously an exaggeration. But compared to our love for Jesus our love for even our family looks like hate. Especially in Jesus’ day, neglect of family obligations in deference to Jesus would be viewed as hate. We’re talking about priorities. Who is more important? If anyone other than Jesus tops our list, we are not ready to be his disciple.

Furthermore, a disciple must pick up his cross daily (lit., his own cross). When a man picked up his cross, he embarked on a one-way journey from which he would not return. The cross is not merely a burden, a ministry, or an inconvenience. Nor is it even a willingness to die for Jesus. It is an instrument of execution which brought horror to Jesus’ audience. You see, crucifixion was an ugly reminder of Roman domination. To make matters worse, Deuteronomy 21:22-23 specifies that anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed. These Jews must have been somewhat scandalized by Jesus’ bold demand . . . so should we. But the truth remains, every Christian is subject to a death sentence for life (cf. Gal 2:20-21; 2 Cor 5:14-21; Phil 3:4-11).

 Lk 14:28-30 ²⁸“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’”

This is the first of two parables Jesus tells about counting the cost. The word “estimate” originally meant “to count with pebbles.” It indicated a meticulous reckoning of the specific cost. It is no mere estimation; it is an explicit calculation.

The foundation is generally the most important and most costly part of a building. But it is only the beginning. Many disciples just get started in the faith and run out of steam. It is like the rocky ground in the parable of the soils. The seed quickly sprouts, but has no root. So as soon as the sun gets a little hot, it withers.

One reason to count the cost is to avoid ridicule. The foolish builder becomes a laughingstock to the whole city, as his unfinished foundation stands as a monument to his stupidity.

 Lk 14:31-33 ³¹“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³²If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”

This second parable deals with fighting rather than building. You can either fight, run or talk. If you aren’t big enough to fight, and can’t afford to run, you

¹⁷ Interestingly, Philo also considered the abandonment of families essential to true proselyte conversion (*De Specialibus Legibus* 51-52). Cf. M. Lattke, “The Call to Discipleship and Proselytizing,” *HTR* 92/3 (1999): 359-362.

had better start talkin'! The point is, before you get into a fight, you had better consider carefully if you have what it takes to finish it. Likewise, before you come to Jesus, you had better carefully consider whether you have what it takes to stick it out for the long haul. It is the faithful, not the flashy, who will be saved!

In the world, we ask, “Does he have what it takes to win?” In the church, God asks, “Has he given up everything to be saved?” The world calls us to gain; Christ call us to die. This certainly does not mean that we retain no possessions. But it does indicate renouncing those possessions as your own.¹⁸ God is now in control of our stock. It is at his disposal to use as he chooses.

³⁴“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

Lk 14:34-35

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

[vv. 34-35 = Mt 5:13, see comments on § 54c; also Mk 9:50, § 91]

This is a famous saying of Jesus.¹⁹ Only here, verse 35 adds an extra detail about being thrown on the manure pile. Sodium chloride (i.e., salt) is an extremely stable chemical. It cannot actually “lose its saltiness.” Therefore, we must be talking about some kind of counterfeit salt. It looks like salt but has none of its properties. It was so worthless that it did not even have chemical nutrients which could be useful on a compost pile.²⁰ It is totally useless filler.

This is important stuff. That's why Jesus calls his audience to wake up and pay attention with this Hebraism: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

This is the great “Lost and Found” chapter of the Bible. It is a single explosive discourse, started by the first two verses. Jesus tells three parables, back to back, about the great joy of finding something lost. This passage is especially poignant on the heels of the banquet in the Pharisees’ house (Lk 14:1-24).

§ 116
Parables of
Lost and
Found
(Lk 15:1-32)



¹⁸Such is the implication of the word *apotassetai* (“give up”). The present tense probably implies a continual abandonment even under one’s own management. T.E. Schmidt, “Burden, Barrier, Blasphemy: Wealth in Mt 6:33, Lk 14:33, and Lk 16:15,” *TrinJ* 9 [n.s.] (Fall 1988): 171-189, has an insightful analysis of Jesus’ “money talk” and our neglect to either listen to or apply his commands.

¹⁹W. Nauck interprets the major “salt” sayings of the NT (Mk 9:49-50; Lk 14:34-35; Mt 5:13; Col 4:6) against the backdrop of a proverb on salt from the Rabbinic treatise *Derek Erec Zuta*. He proposes that each text is best understood by interpreting the metaphor of salt as wisdom and industriousness in the context of discipleship. This fits well our present context of judiciously counting the cost of following Jesus and wisely listening to (i.e., obeying) Jesus’ words (W. Nauck, “Salt as a Metaphor,” *ST* [1952]: 165-178).

²⁰E.P. Deatrick, “Salt, Soil, Savior,” *BA* 25 (1962): 41-48.

Lk 15:1-2 ¹Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

It all started when the Pharisees kept grumbling about Jesus fraternizing with “sinners.”²¹ They contemptuously state, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Their statement is true, but derogatory. They are insinuating that because Jesus eats with them he is like them. You know, “Birds of a feather flock together.” Jesus has a reputation of welcoming sinners (cf. Lk 7:29, 34, 37). He even calls Matthew, a tax collector, to be one of his special Apostles (Mt 9:9-13). He goes so far as to eat in his house! Later on he will eat with Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector!

But when Jesus eats with sinners, they don’t defile him; he cleans them up. It’s like when Jesus healed the leper. Instead of Jesus being defiled, the leper was cleansed. Oh what joy that was to Jesus, to search and find and save a sinner.

THE LOST SHEEP (cf. Mt 18:12-14); Emphasis: The Lost

Lk 15:3-7 ³Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

Jesus’ Jewish, agricultural audience has no trouble picturing this parable. There are sheep all around them. And everyone knows that sheep get lost. It was a common problem. They kind of wander aimlessly as they graze. Pretty soon they look around and they are all alone. Typically a lost sheep will lay down and bleat until it is found. Often looking for a lost sheep was a group effort. Thus, many in the audience had been on a “sheep hunt” if not for themselves, for a friend or neighbor.

They knew the joy of finding a sheep. Not only were sheep a valuable agricultural commodity, they were semi-pets. They each had their own name and were clearly dependent on the care of the shepherd. Thus, the shepherd and his sheep had a tender relationship. If it is natural to look for lost sheep, how much more should we expect God to look for lost people (cf. 1 Pet 2:25)? Jesus is doing exactly what we would expect God to do — seeking and saving the lost. This is all the more true when we understand that “sheep” in the OT was a symbol for God’s people (cf. Ps 23:1ff; 119:176; Ezek 34:1ff; Zech 11:16-17; Isa 40:11; 53:6; Jer 23:1).

²¹Notice that the NIV places the word “sinners” in quotations. This editorial addition accurately reflects the Pharisees’ attitude about Jesus’ friends without Luke, himself, buying into it.

So the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep to look for one. Presumably he leaves them with his helpers. No one was foolish enough to leave a flock of sheep unattended in an open field. Once he finds the little lost lamb, he puts it on his shoulders. This was a popular picture in the early church:

We cannot go through any part of the catacombs, or turn over the pages of any collection of ancient Christian monuments, without coming across it again and again. We know from Tertullian that it was often designed upon chalices. We find it ourselves painted in fresco upon the roofs and walls of the sepulchral chambers; rudely scratched upon gravestones, or more carefully sculptured on sarcophagi; traced in gold upon glass, molded on lamps, engraved on rings; and, in a word, represented on every species of Christian monument that has come down to us.²²

There is joy in finding what was lost. This is so natural, so human, so divine! Just as we rejoice over something lost that has been found, so too, does God. If we have \$1,000 in the bank, but lose a \$20 bill, we will look until we find it. And when we find it we are more thrilled about the \$20 being found than over the fact that we still had \$1,000 in the bank. All God's people are precious. But there is still something especially joyful to God about "finding" a lost soul. "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9).

THE LOST COIN, Emphasis: The Search

⁸"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins^a and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Lk 15:8-10

^a8 Greek *ten drachmas*, each worth about a day's wages

Several observations about this parable bring it to life. First, the coin this woman lost was a drachma. It was worth about a day's wage. Second, considering that women generally did not work independently from the family business, this was either given to her by her husband or was part of her dowry. Jeremias suggests that her dowry may have been worn as a headdress from which one of the coins was lost.²³ Either way, it would be a precious resource to her and a large embarrassment if she lost it. She lights a lamp to look for it. Either her house had few windows, or she is not willing to wait for the morning light — she must find it now! Besides, when you are living on dirt floors, the longer

²² Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. 1, p. 383.

²³ Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), p. 134, contra J.D.M. Derrett, "Fresh Light on the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin," *NTS* 26 (1979-80): 36-60.

something is lost, the more likely it is to stay that way. We also notice that the Greek word for “friends” is feminine. We can’t be sure that she ever told her husband, but she does tell her sewing circle. Jesus has thus put the “lost and found” in terms that both men and women can understand.

THE LOST SON, Emphasis: The Restoration

Lk 15:11-16 ¹¹Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

¹³“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.”

Charles Dickens said, of this parable, “It is the finest short story ever written.” This is the most famous parable of the trilogy and the climax of the series. It is also the longest parable Jesus ever told. It has two parts. The first is about the son who wanders and the second is about the son who doesn’t. The first son gets lost abroad, the second gets lost at home. The second son is equally important because it brings us back to vv. 1-2 where the Pharisees (the sons who did not wander) complain about Jesus socializing with the lost sons.

The story opens with the younger son prematurely demanding his inheritance. The inheritance of a Jewish man was divided according to the number of sons he had, plus one. If he had three sons, it was divided into four parts; four sons, five parts; etc. The oldest son got the extra part, called the “double portion” (Deut 21:17). This man had two sons. The estate was then divided into three parts. One third was to go to the younger son at the death of his father.²⁴ Until that time, however, he has absolutely no right to claim his inheritance. In fact, to demand his inheritance early was like saying, “Drop dead, Dad.”²⁵ This impudent young buck is declaring that he can no longer live under his father’s roof. Only by his father’s graciousness does he receive anything.

We might also note that the father divides it between them. The older son gets his share too — although perhaps only in promissory notes rather than in tangible coins like his brother. Nonetheless, the fact that he already has received what is his, makes his complaining at the end of the parable offensive.

The younger son, eager for independence, travels far in search of greener grass. Hard times hit. They hit especially hard for such a foolish fellow who has squandered his resources. He is desperate! So he hires himself — literally,

²⁴J.D.M. Derrett, “Law in the N.T.: The Parable of the Prodigal Son,” *NTS* 14 (1967-68): 56-74, points out that some of the estate would be set aside for maintenance of the farm and unmarried females. Thus, his share would probably be more like $\frac{2}{3}$ rather than $\frac{1}{3}$.

²⁵E.H. Hiehl, “The Lost’ Parables in Luke’s Gospel Account,” *CJ* 18 (1992): 244-258.

“attached himself” — to a local hog farmer. He thrusts himself on a citizen of that country who probably neither needed nor wanted him. Thus, he is given the lowest job, and one ultimately odious to the Jew — feeding pigs. It would be difficult to paint, for a Jew, a picture of deeper depravity than this.

Just when it seems that things can’t get any worse, they do. He gets so hungry that he is prepared to eat the carob pods which belonged to the pigs. They were edible, but only as a last resort. A diet of carob pods is mentioned in other Jewish literature as that of direst need, the most extreme poverty. They are shaped like a pair of miniature horns and thus derive the name *keration*, meaning “little horns.”

¹⁷^aWhen he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ ²⁰So he got up and went to his father.

Lk 15:17-20

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”

This whole sad situation slaps the boy back into reality. He “came to his senses.” This phrase indicates a return to sanity. The young man wisely chooses to return home. He would clearly be better off as a slave to his father than a slave to this pig farmer. As he approaches the farm, the father sees him and runs to greet him. In the Middle East, running was an act of indignity.²⁶ This father ignores the proper protocol in excitement for his son. Jesus does not indicate whether the father is standing and waiting or just happens to look up and see him at the end of the drive. What Jesus does say, however, is that the father takes the initiative for reconciliation. He throws himself on his son’s neck with many kisses [*katephilesen*], ignoring the filth and stench of the swine, the tattered clothes and empty pockets.

²¹^aThe son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven²⁷ and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.^a

Lk 15:21-24

²²^aBut the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.”

^a21 Some early manuscripts *son. Make me like one of your hired men.*

Originally the son thought of becoming a servant in his father’s house. He has his whole speech memorized verbatim (vv. 18-19). But before he is able to

²⁶See K.E. Bailey, “The Pursuing Father,” *CT* 42/12 (1998): 34-40, for other historical details to this story.

²⁷“Against heaven” is a Hebraism, meaning “Against God.” It may also indicate that his sins had “reached to heaven” (Liefeld, p. 984).

get even half of it out of his mouth (v. 21), his father starts barking out orders to the servants and lavishes on the boy all the trappings of an honored son.

The robe, ring, and sandals are more than signs of comfort, they are signs of sonship and freedom. The robe was such as would be given to an honored guest. The ring is a sign of authority. And the sandals represent freedom since slaves went about barefoot. His father clearly restores him to the place of an honored son. In short, he is “alive again.” This word for “resurrection” is an obvious allusion to the effects of sin. This parable has the seeds of NT theology — being dead in sin but alive in Christ (Rom 6:4, 9, 11; 7:4; 8:10-11; Eph 2:5; Col 2:13).

Lk 15:25-32

²⁵“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

³¹“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

This begins the second part of the parable, concerning the older brother. This conclusion to the discourse brings us back to verses 1 and 2 where the Pharisees are upset because Jesus is spending time with publicans and sinners.

The older brother hears the music [*sympphonias*] and dancing [*choron*] on his way in from the field. He is obviously curious. There is a surprise party for somebody. Perhaps he thinks it’s for him. When a servant says that his lost little brother has come home and is the one being honored, he becomes angry and refuses to go in. His little brother has belligerently demanded his inheritance, dishonored his father, squandered his estate, and shamed his family. The older brother is justified (logically and legally) in his anger. But the letter of the law does not always coincide with the spirit of the law. He misses compassion and forgiveness, which far outweigh retribution.

His father goes out to the elder brother.²⁸ For the second time that day he goes out to retrieve a lost son. But the elder brother, jealous of the party going on inside, is not yet ready to give up his own private pity-party. His opening comment, “Look!” sets the tone for this encounter. Not only does he chide his brother, but by extension he criticizes his own father. “This son of yours,” sticks out like a sore thumb. He is not willing to call the prodigal his own brother. He also levels several accusations against his brother that he can’t even know for sure are true. For instance, the story never mentions his hiring prostitutes.

²⁸ The father going out to meet his son is the climax of each half of the parable according to G.W. Ramsey, “Plots, Gaps, Repetitions, and Ambiguity in Luke 15,” *PRS* 17 (1990): 33-42.

The father's response is gentle and reasonable. The older brother has and will get his just reward. That's not even an issue. The primary issue is not justice, but gladness. His brother²⁹ was lost, but now has been found (Eph 2:1-5).

Again we end this third parable with a note of great joy at finding that which was lost. The older brother, however, adds an interesting twist. Whatever happened to him? Did he, or did he not, enter the house with his father and begin rejoicing over his brother's return? Perhaps Jesus does not tell because the story has not yet ended. Jesus stands in the middle of the prodigals: tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees stand on the fringe. The story is still in progress. The outcome is not yet determined.

To understand the context of chapter 16, we must go back to 15:1-2.³⁰ Jesus has surrounded himself with tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees stand on the perimeter, criticizing. Chapter 15 is a series of three parables directed toward the Pharisees. They tell of God's initiative in seeking the lost. On the other hand, chapter 16 talks about man's initiative. We have here a pair of parables. The first is directed toward the disciples, the second goes back to the Pharisees. The first tells us how to use our money to get to heaven. The second tells us how to use our money to get to hell.³¹

**§ 117a
Parable of the
Shrewd
Manager
(Lk 16:1-13)**



¹Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ²So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

Lk 16:1-4

³"The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg—⁴I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'"

Once upon a time there was this wealthy man who put one of his servants in charge of his household affairs. Now, this servant was probably not a freeman but neither was he a busboy. It was his job to distribute his master's goods —

²⁹"Very few translations reflect the interesting fact that Luke has the father use *exactly the same turn of phrase* in his reply; ' . . . ho adelphos sou houtos . . .' (v. 32)" (T. Corlett, "'This Brother of yours,'" *Expt* 100 [1989]: 216).

³⁰The NIV leaves out an important word: "Also." "And Jesus also said to the disciples . . ." This connects chapter sixteen with 15:1, 2. M.R. Austin, "The Hypocritical Son," *EvQ* 57 (1985): 307-315, goes so far as to say that the parables of the lost sheep and coin are a pair, and the parables of the prodigal son and the prodigal steward are a pair and should thus be read in connection to each other. Moreover, David Landry, "Honor Restored: New Light on the Parable of the Prudent Steward (Lk 16:1-8a)," *JBL* 119/2 (2000): 287-309, points out that this parable structurally is very similar to the Prodigal Son that preceded it and thus the two parables should be connected exegetically.

³¹According to H.K. Farrell, the chiasm of Luke's travel narrative (9:51-19:44) would pair these parables with the money talk of Lk 12:16-21. "The Structure and Theology of Luke's Central Section," *TrinJ* 7 (1986): 33.

food, salaries, etc. It was a highly trusted position, which he apparently abused. Someone ratted on him. That put him in a precarious position. He would be out of his cushy pencil-pushing job. His options were few and unattractive.

A person in such a high position can't just be dispatched immediately. He still has to collect the paperwork, close out the inventories and clean out his desk. He uses this small window of opportunity to his advantage. Jesus commends him for that. He does not necessarily condone what he does but how he does it.

Lk 16:5-9

⁵"So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

⁶"Eight hundred gallons^a of olive oil,' he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'

⁷"Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

"A thousand bushels^b of wheat,' he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

⁸"The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

^a6 Greek *one hundred batous* (probably about 3 kiloliters) ^b7 Greek *one hundred korous* (probably about 35 kiloliters)

By reducing the debts he would certainly make friends. As the household manager, he still had the authority to do that. This "bill" was actually a written document, signed by both parties as a contract for payment. Once it was turned back over to the debtor he was free from his obligation. The account was "paid in full." This may not have been ethical, but it was legal.

Derrett suggests that he was not reducing the actual debt owed but simply knocking off the interest (i.e., "usury") that had accrued on the loan. If this was the case, he would have been rightly following OT law (Exod 22:25; Lev 25:36-37; Deut 15:7-8; 23:19-20).³² Although this act would have lowered the master's

³²J.D.M. Derrett, "Fresh Light on St Luke 16:1, The Parable of the Unjust Steward," *NTS* 7 (1961): 198-219. However, Derrett's deductions are based on the Mishnah tractates which were not codified until the third century. Furthermore, the parable does not suggest that the servant reduced the usury from the payment. In fact, the term "unrighteous manager" [*ton oikonomon tēs adikias*] seems to speak against the view that the manager was a noble character. J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Story of the Dishonest Manager," *TS* 25 (1964): 23-42, offers an alternate explanation. He suggests that the steward reduced the debt by the amount of his commission. Both Fitzmeyer and Derrett would thus interpret the steward's actions as legal and commendable. This alleviates the tension of a master praising a dishonest deed. But both theories appear to go beyond the evidence available concerning ancient contracts and the job of managers. Like Derrett and Fitzmyer, D. Landry and B. May argue that the steward actually did a good thing. They suggest that the real issue is not money but honor. By pilfering funds he shamed his master who would be ridiculed for not being able to control his servant. When the servant reduced the debts, however, he would cause the master to be seen as magnanimous. Thus the steward undid the damage to his master's reputation. "Honor Restored: New Light on the Parable of the Prudent Steward (Lk. 16:1-8a)," *JBL* 119/2 (2000): 287-309.

income, it would have raised his reputation. To that extent it would have been a wise move for both the manager and the master.

The master commended the manager. Surely he was not pleased with being defrauded, but he couldn't help but be impressed with the shrewd servant's scheme. In those days, servants did sometimes defraud their masters and those they helped were obliged to scratch their backs in return.³³

Are we to believe that Jesus used a bad person as a good example?³⁴ Why not? Even an enemy can be pleasantly impressed with the skill of his opponent.³⁵ What parent hasn't used this kind of logic? It goes something like this: "If that rotten Billy Schmutz can be nice to his kid sister, surely you can do as much!"

Jesus is not exalting the man's dishonesty, his wastefulness, his laziness or his pride. He is commanding his ability to use his present and temporary power and resources to make preparation for what was coming. We who are children of light should do no less. We must use our power, resources and abilities to prepare for eternity. We do that in at least two ways. Primarily, we use our resources and abilities to make investments into eternal things (Mt 6:19-21, 33). We win friends (specifically God) who can help us when we are helpless (e.g., judgment) so that we will have a comfortable place when we lose our job (i.e., when we die). Secondly, we evangelize the lost, using whatever resources and skills we have so that they too can prepare for the future. Both of these points will be further illustrated in the second parable (vv. 19-31).

The children of light (Eph 5:8) can be so naive! We are afraid that if we are shrewd, we are being unchristian. We feel we should not use secular abilities or procedures in the work of the kingdom. But Jesus said, "Be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves" (Mt 10:16). We ought to be impressive examples of sagacity to this world!

This "shrewd use of resources" must also include our money, especially for Americans who have been entrusted with so much of it! The wisest use of money is not temporal pleasure, but eternal security. Present investments in the poor will be honored by God in eternity. Just how that might happen is explained in the second parable in vv. 19-31.

³³Cf. John S. Kloppenborg, "The Dishonoured Master (Luke 16:1-8a)" *Biblica* 70 (1989): 474-495.

³⁴Some have difficulty with Jesus commanding a bad person. Hence, they interpret Jesus' words as irony. They understand Jesus something like this: "Yeah, right, you go ahead and try to make friends with filthy lucre. Just see if they can help you in eternity." The manager is thus an example of what NOT to do (cf. D.R. Fletcher, "The Riddle of the Unjust Steward: Is Irony the Key?" *JBL* 82 [1963]: 15-30).

³⁵There are a number of examples in Greco-Roman literature where a trickster servant was honored for outwitting his master. These come especially from the lives of Aesop and Plautus. See M.A. Beavis, "Ancient Slavery as an Interpretive Context for the New Testament Servant Parables with Special Reference to the Unjust Steward (Lk 16:1-8)," *JBL* 111/1 (1992): 37-54. Some have even suggested that Jesus is the rogue in this story who is accused of mishandling the affairs of God (cf. W. Loader, "Jesus and the Rogue in Luke 16:1-8a: The Parable of the Unjust Steward," *RB* 96/4 [1989]: 518-532).

Lk 16:10-13

^{10^a}Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹²And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

^{13^a}No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

[v. 13 = Mt 6:24, see comments on § 54g]

This is axiomatic. The stock boy who pilfers from the grocery store will embezzle from the company if he ever gets to be the CEO. The person who foolishly spends his/her last five bucks will probably do no better if (s)he wins the lottery. The converse is also true. The child who saves his allowance will likely have a healthy IRA as an adult. The woman who tithes her puny alimony will likely tithe a substantial inheritance check that she may acquire.

If this is true, then God can certainly tell how we will handle spiritual wealth by the way we handle material wealth. If we honor God with our finances, then we can be entrusted with larger spiritual responsibilities and riches. But if God does not have control of our pocketbooks, then it is unlikely that he has full control of any other part of us.

§ 117b
**The Story
of Lazarus
and Dives**
(Lk 16:14-31)

TRANSITIONAL TEACHINGS ON WEALTH:

These "transitional teachings" may look like a random collection clustered here somewhat out of place. They are, after all, found in Matthew's account in different contexts. But they have two important functions in this pericope. First, they form a transitional bridge between the two parables on wealth; the first being directed primarily to his disciples, the second to the Pharisees. Second, they summarize four practical results of the Pharisees' love for money: (1) They value things that God hates (v. 15). (2) They attempt to violently overtake the kingdom of God (v. 16). (3) They set aside the Word of God especially where it conflicts with their financial interests (v. 17). (4) And they divorce their wives.

Lk 16:14-18

¹⁴The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. ¹⁵He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

^{16^a}The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. ^{17^a}It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.

^{18^a}Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

The Pharisees, because of their love for money, sneered at Jesus' teaching. The Greek word has the connotation of turning one's nose up or even snorting at. People today are no different. Our possessions have not gotten us one inch closer to things that really matter. In fact, temporal things often build barriers between us and God.

[v. 16 = Mt 11:12-13, see comments on § 57]

There are three primary interpretations of verse 16. First, it may be a compliment to all those following after Jesus.³⁶ Hendrickson says,

But what is necessary is that men vigorously press forward into the kingdom, and this is exactly what since the days of John the Baptist, courageous men have been doing. Entrance into the kingdom requires genuine self-denial, earnest endeavor, untiring energy, utmost exertion.³⁷

However, Jesus' primary audience is the Pharisees, not his followers (v. 14). In addition, this word "forcing" [*biazetai*] indicates violence and opposition, not merely force. This is even more obvious in Matthew 11:12.

Second, J. Cortes (following F. Godet's 1889 commentary) suggests that v. 16 means something like this: "The law and the prophets (were in effect) until the time of John [the Baptist]; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is being proclaimed [by Jesus], and everyone is *insistently urged* to enter it (the kingdom)."³⁸ This does have the advantage of explaining the word "all." After all, neither "all" of the Pharisees opposed Jesus, nor "all" of Jesus' followers pursued him relentlessly. But "all" people were urged strongly to enter the kingdom. In addition, the word *biazetai* can mean "urge strongly." It is used that way in the LXX. And in NT times it was practically synonymous with *parabibazomai*, which means to "urge strongly" (cf. Lk 24:29 & Acts 16:15). While this interpretation is possible here (even though "urge strongly" is not the primary definition of *biazetai*), it hardly fits Matthew 11:12. Since these two are such close parallels, it seems best to find an interpretation that fits both passages.

As we suggested on Matthew 11:12, this is neither a compliment to Jesus' preaching nor to his followers. It is an insult to the Pharisees. The kingdom of God was promised through the prophets up to the time of John. Now it is here. What do the Pharisees do with it? As a whole, they oppose it violently.

[v. 17 = Mt 5:18, see comments on § 54d]

³⁶This is the unanimous view of the early church fathers according to F. W. Danker, "Lk 16:16 — An Opposition Logion," *JBL* 77 (1958): 231-243.

³⁷W. Hendrickson, *The Gospel of Luke* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), p. 774.

³⁸J.B. Cortes, "On the Meaning of Luke 16:16," *JBL* 106/2 (1987): 247-259.

Jesus just nailed the Pharisees for opposing the kingdom proclaimed by the prophets. Now he puts the nail in the coffin. The reason the Pharisees oppose the present work of God (v. 16) is because they ignore the previous revelation of God in the Scriptures (v. 17). But they won't be able to stop the growth of the kingdom any more than they can rewrite the Bible. The declarations of God stand for eternity. Those who stand against Jesus stand against the Scripture and its Author. One of them will fall. Can you guess which one?

[v. 18 = Mt 19:9 & Mk 10:11, see comments on § 122; also Mt 5:32, § 54e]

The Pharisees would deny that they ignore the Scriptures. So Jesus gives one of many examples of how they do. Let's take the subject of divorce. The Bible says "God hates divorce" (Mal 2:16). But the Pharisees weaseled their way out of the law. This "allowed" them to abuse women and gain financially. The results of divorce are hardly different today: Women's freedom and finances suffer while men's raise. God still hates it.

Back to the issue at hand. Jesus told his disciples this parable about using money to get into heaven (Lk 16:1-13). He then turns his attention back to the Pharisees (v. 14) with a miscellany of "money talk." This sets up our last parable in this series. It describes how one might use money to go to hell.

THE STORY OF LAZARUS AND DIVES:



If this story is a parable it is an unusual one. For instance, it has no introduction like other parables. And unlike other parables, it names one of its players, Lazarus (which means "God helps"). Such a symbolic name would be appropriate in this parable.³⁹ It seems curious, though, that it comes so close to the actual raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44; § 118). Thus some interpret this story as a literal description of Lazarus' experience in the grave. However, the Lazarus of John 11 was apparently a well-to-do fellow, not a pauper like this guy. In addition, this story has certain characteristics of a parable and follows a string of parables. Therefore, it is probably best to treat it as a parable.⁴⁰ As such, we should be cautious about gleaning from these verses a picture of the intermediate state of the dead since not all details of a parable are intended to be interpreted. Besides, this parable is not about the dead but about the living. Jesus has been speaking to the Pharisees who loved wealth more than they loved the prophets. This parable is designed to show them the eternal consequences of their present

³⁹ R. Bauckham, "The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels," *NTS* 37 (1991): 225-246, points out that in stories of people raising from the dead, the individuals are almost always named. Furthermore, it would be necessary here to name Lazarus since the descriptions of the rich man and the poor man are reversed after they die.

⁴⁰ For a full argument that this is a parable, see Charles Ray, "The Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31)," *TheolEd* 56 (Fall 1997): 77-84.

use of wealth. Thus, this is the flip-side of the previous parable. Its theme is “reversal.” In the end, God will more than even the score.⁴¹

¹⁹⁴⁴There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

Lk 16:19-24

²²The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In hell,^a where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’”

^a23Greek *Hades*

This rich man had the best and was not afraid to flaunt it. His purple clothes were the most expensive of the day and his table was stuffed with delicacies. Lazarus, in stark contrast, was a beggar. He was apparently lame since his friends had to carry him each day to the place where he begged for alms. Rather than sumptuous clothes, he was decorated with open ulcers. The dogs, odious to the Jews, came and licked (and snipped at) his sores. This was utter degradation.

As you would expect, even in their funerals there was a considerable contrast between Lazarus and Dives.⁴² The body of the rich man was undoubtedly anointed and wrapped and placed in an expensive tomb. The body of the poor man was probably tossed with contempt on the flames of the city dump (Gehenna). But then we get a glimpse of “The Other Side.”

The NIV’s “hell” is literally “*hades*.” The Greeks believed it was a place of continued human consciousness where the good were comforted and the evil were tormented. That is the picture Luke paints for us here. But that is also the picture of “*sheol*” in the OT. Thus, *hades* is an appropriate translation in the LXX for the Hebrew word *sheol*.

Hades is not the ultimate destiny of the wicked. That would be the lake of fire, which is not yet in use (Rev 20:11-15). Rather, it is a temporary place of imprisonment for disembodied souls and a precursor to future reward or punishment. At the final judgment Hades is going to be forced to give up its dead (Rev 20:12, 13). Then Hades, with his bride, Death, will be permanently destroyed (Rev 20:14; 1 Cor 15:26). It seems that in the final state (i.e., New Jerusalem

⁴¹Jesus' story was not unique. It has a number of parallels in ancient literature: The Egyptian story of Si Osiris (cf. R. Baucham, “The Rich Man and Lazarus,” *NTS* 37 [1991]: 225-246); The Cynic story of Micyllus (cf. R. F. Hock, “Lazarus and Micyllus: Greco-Roman Backgrounds to Luke 16:19-31,” *JBL* 106/3 [1987]: 447-463); and the Jewish Apocrypha in 1 Enoch 22 (cf. L. Kreitzer, “Lk 16:19-31 and 1 Enoch 22,” *ExPT* 103 [1992]: 139-142). However, just because these stories use the same theme or basic plot is no reason to assume that they are necessarily dependent on each other. Jesus, in particular, was perfectly capable of developing this theme independently. What this does mean, however, is that Jesus' audience would recognize the basic story line of this parable.

⁴²The early church named the wealthy character Dives, which is the Latin word for “rich man,” or Neves (cf. K. Grobel, “... ‘Whose Name was Neves,’” *NTS* 10 [1963-64]: 373-382).

and the lake of fire) that the experiences of those in Hades will be intensified. In other words, those who are in torment will find their suffering multiplied. Those who are being comforted will find inexpressible joy.

Lk 16:25-31

²⁵"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

²⁷"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, ²⁸for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

²⁹"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

³⁰"'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

³¹"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

The issue here is really not egalitarianism on the other side of the grave. A poor man may, in fact, find himself in torment and a rich man may find himself in comfort. The reason the rich man was in torment was because of his gross financial neglect of the poor. He is not suffering because he was rich but because he was unrighteous with his riches.

He is now experiencing a hellish torment from which there can be no reprieve, especially by Lazarus, the one he had refused to help in his time of suffering. Now he would like to at least save his brothers from this same terrible fate. Unfortunately, Lazarus can't help his brothers any more than he could help Dives.

Bock offers this insight: "Do not let wealth and blessing harden you into viewing the less fortunate as judged, irrelevant, or as objects only to be used when the occasion permits. Do not let your fortune close you off from seeing and reaching out to meet the needs of others. Do not learn the name of the poor only to ignore the need."⁴³

We like to think that miracles are sure ammunition for evangelism. They are not. Jesus' most astounding miracles didn't convince everyone. If someone is not inclined to listen to the prophets, they will not be moved by a miracle, even one as great as a resurrection.

Here we get a glimpse of what goes on beyond the grave. The punch of this text, however, is in the here-and-now. If this parable tells the truth we had better be about the business of evangelism. Let us stand with the prophets on this side of the grave, announcing the good news of Jesus and warning about the dangerous reality of hell. But even more directly, this passage warns us that our present financial management has eternal repercussions. Neglect of the poor will

⁴³ D. Bock, "The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and the Ethics of Jesus," *SwJT* 40/1 (1997): 63-72.

have frightfully severe consequences.⁴⁴ H. Kvalbein rightly says, “A life of affluence and luxury closes your ears to the Word of God and your eyes to the need of your neighbor.”⁴⁵

Here Jesus talks about rights that a disciple does not have. We do not have the right to “do our own thing” if it causes another to sin (vv. 1-2). We do not have the right to keep our mouths shut when we see another sinning (v. 3). We do not have the right to be judgmental or to bear a grudge (v. 4). And we do not have the right to feel smug or complacent in our work for the Lord (vv. 7-10).

§ 117c
Miscellaneous
Lessons on
Discipleship
(Lk 17:1-10)

These miscellaneous lessons are collected here by Luke without his usual chronological markers.⁴⁶ They may represent an actual day’s teaching. But more likely, they are a collection of common themes of Jesus which reflect the kind of discussions he had during his later Judean/ Perea ministry. There is a similar collection in Matthew 18, with many identical sayings (cf. § 91-92).

¹Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. ²It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. ³So watch yourselves.

Lk 17:1-6

“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

⁶He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”

[vv. 1-2 = Mt 18:6-7, see comments on § 91]

The phrase “things that cause people to sin” is all one Greek word [*skandalon*] meaning “stone of stumbling.” It was an obstacle that tripped people up. We might relate it to a raised crack in the sidewalk. They are bound to come, sometimes purposely, sometimes inadvertently, but come they will. It is not too surprising to find them coming through unbelievers; you would expect that. But they are

⁴⁴ The message of this parable got through to Albert Schweitzer. He was both a renowned concert organist and a famous professor of NT in the University of Strasbourg. But in 1913 he gave all that up to become a medical missionary in equatorial Africa. In his own words: “The parable of Dives and Lazarus seemed to me to have been spoken directly to us! We are Dives . . . so do we sin against the poor man at our gate” (*On the Edge of the Primeval Forest* [1922]).

⁴⁵ H. Kvalbein, “Jesus and the Poor: Two Texts and a Tentative Conclusion,” *Themelios* 12 (1986-87): 86.

⁴⁶ Liefeld notes that “the introductory words ‘Jesus said to his disciples’ are similar to those in other places where there apparently is no attempt to establish a chronological sequence (e.g., 12:22, 54; 13:6; 16:1)” (p. 993).

all the more deadly when they come through believers because they come as a surprise. Paul talks at length about this in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8-10 in relation to eating meats sacrificed to idols. It is imperative that Christians monitor their own behavior so as not to be a stumbling block to others.

There is a heavy consequence for causing anyone to sin, but especially the little ones. Jesus is probably speaking more directly about children than “spiritual babes” (cf. Mt 18:6-7). Children may not be able to understand our theological platitudes, but they certainly watch our behavior closely. The key is laid out in verse three: “Watch yourselves!” Because you can be sure that the kids are!

We do not have the right to privacy of our own actions. Nor do we have the right to privacy if a brother is sinning. We are obliged to go to the brother in love, in purity, and in gentleness and rebuke him. Matthew 18:15-20 gives three specific steps to follow when rebuking a brother [see comments on § 92]. The steps are simple enough to follow, but they are seldom carried out. Why? For one thing, we don’t want to hurt anybody’s feelings. You know, that’s the stuff that splits churches. Besides, we really don’t want people prying into our business. So we leave them alone, hoping they will extend the same courtesy to us and praying that the problem just kind of goes away. But the result is a church with sin swept under its carpets. This places a dark spiritual cloud over the assembly which hinders our worship, fellowship and evangelism.

[vv. 3-4 = Mt 18:21-22, see comments on § 92]

Two things are noteworthy in verses 3-4. First, Jesus uses a ridiculously high number of times that a person would sin against you. This just doesn’t happen. A person would leave town before they got abused this way. To make matters worse, Jesus has them doing it daily! The point is essentially, “No matter how much a person sins against you,” you are to forgive them. Of course, the way Jesus phrases it is more fun to listen to. Second, we notice that Jesus does not say, “If they repent,” but “If they say, ‘I repent.’” We are not to be the judge of whether or not another person repents. We can’t see their heart or motives. We must accept that person’s confession.

If we take Jesus’ words literally and implement them practically, this is tough stuff! No wonder the disciples cried, “Increase our faith!” (literally, “impart to us faith”). They asked for an instant, spontaneous fix of faith. But generally that is not how faith is developed. Most often it comes through the grist and grit of difficult circumstances, the monotony of our daily existence, and the raw exposure of our own imperfections.

Part of the problem is that we want great faith; but Jesus just wants growing faith. The Greek text does not have the word “small” in verse six. It simply says “faith *as* a grain of mustard seed.” Elsewhere, the mustard seed has been likened to the kingdom of God (Lk 13:18-21). It illustrates how something starts out little but ends up big. But the emphasis is not only on its littleness but on its

potential for growth. Such is faith. It naturally gets bigger. If we put it to use, it will increase thousands of times its original size. In other words, it doesn't matter where you start; it matters where you're headed.

Growing faith can do wondrous things, like moving mulberry trees. That would be an impressive feat since the mulberry tree grows to a height of 35 feet. But Jesus has no interest in tossing trees around, or even mountains for that matter (cf. Mt 17:20; 21:21; Mk 11:23). Our greatest obstacles are not trees but principalities and powers. The true faith-work of the Christian is obeying God and sharing the gospel.

⁷“Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? ⁸Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? ⁹Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

Lk 17:7-10

This illustration is so clear, it needs little comment but one small warning. In our culture these words sound offensive. We must think with the mindset of the first century where slavery was a common and accepted practice.⁴⁷

When you own a slave you expect that slave to do all he is told. When it is done, you don't expect to thank a slave for doing what he is told. No matter how well a slave carries out his duties, he is of no real profit to the master until he exceeds his duties. When a slave goes beyond the expectations of the master, he then becomes profitable.

We, like the slave, are of no real profit to God unless we exceed the expectations (which none of us do). Thus, we are all unprofitable servants. The bottom line: There is no room for smugness or complacency for a servant in the kingdom of God. “The demands of vv 1-6 may be heavy, but their fulfillment creates no claim upon God. This is nothing more than the duty we owe him” (Nolland, p. 841).

This passage is the centerpiece of John's Gospel. It looks backward to the previous signs of Jesus, and looks forward to the last and greatest sign, the resurrection. This is the pinnacle of Jesus' public ministry and the passage to his passion. Here we see, as never before, both Jesus' humanity and his deity.⁴⁸

§ 118a
**The Sickness
and Death of
Lazarus**
(Jn 11:1-16)

⁴⁷According to M.A. Beavis, the ratio of slaves to free was 1 in 5 in the empire and 1 in 3 in the city of Rome. They were clearly treated as property and sometimes subjected to harsh treatment and cruel tortures (cf. M.A. Beavis, “Ancient Slavery as an Interpretive Context for the N.T. Servant Parables with Special Reference to the Unjust Steward (Lk 16:1-8),” *JBL* 111/1 [1992]: 37-54).

⁴⁸For an excellent Rhetorical analysis of Jn 11:1-44, see M. W. Stibbe, “A Tomb with a View: Jn 11:1-44 in Narrative-Critical Perspective,” *NTS* 40 (1994): 38-54.

Jn 11:1-6

¹Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. ³So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

⁴When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." ⁵Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

Here in verse one, John introduces his readers for the first time to Lazarus, Mary, Martha, and their hometown of Bethany. According to verse two, John assumes his audience is already familiar with these siblings. Perhaps John expected them to have already read the two synoptic accounts of Mary and Martha. In Luke 10:38-42 we read about Mary sitting as a student at Jesus' feet, leaving the kitchen duties to Martha. Naturally, Martha complained and asked Jesus to make Mary help. In a surprising twist, Jesus refuses to make Mary get up and help because she had "chosen the better." The second story, specifically mentioned in verse two, would take place just one week before Jesus was crucified. It was when Mary lavishly anointed Jesus' feet with an entire pint of very expensive ointment (Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; Jn 12:1-8).

So, before John even tells the story, his audience knows a good little bit about these women. It is understood that they were close friends of Jesus. It is also understood that they were women of faith; Martha of the practical kind, Mary of the lavish, worshipful kind. We know little of Lazarus, but apparently he was a man of means and prominence (cf. v. 19).

Lazarus becomes critically ill. It couldn't have come at a worse time. Jesus has been skirting the boundaries of Judea since the Jerusalem Sanhedrin put a contract out on him after the last two feasts. His demise is only about two months away.⁴⁹ Now Lazarus needs him in Bethany, just two miles from Jerusalem, the heart of this hotbed of danger.

Banking on their friendship, Mary and Martha send a messenger(s) to Jesus. They don't actually ask Jesus to come to Bethany. They simply inform him that Lazarus is on his deathbed. The sisters are polite enough not to presume their family is more important than Jesus' ministry. At the same time, they are certainly hoping that Jesus will break away from his busy travel itinerary to come and heal their brother. Apparently, they even wait until his condition is critical so as not to saddle Jesus with a frivolous request or to have him come to Bethany only to find Lazarus has already recovered. It has come to the point that if Jesus does not intervene, Lazarus is obviously going to die. In fact, they wait too long because about the time the messenger arrives to inform Jesus of Lazarus' condition, he has already died.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Jesus has already attended the Feast of Dedication, December A.D. 29. He still has a fairly lengthy itinerant ministry in Perea as recorded in Lk 17-19; Mt 19-20. Therefore, we speculate that this event took place about one month after Dedication and two months prior to Jesus' death.

⁵⁰We have recreated the chronology as follows: (1) About two days before Lazarus dies, a servant is

John does not tell us exactly where Jesus is, but it was somewhere in Perea, on the other side of the Jordan (Jn 10:40), near where John the Baptist had been baptizing. It probably took a good two days for the messenger to get to Jesus. Surprisingly, Jesus sends him back home with the words, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it” (cf. 9:3). However, when he returns to Bethany, Lazarus is already dead.

Now this message must have puzzled the sisters, especially the part about Lazarus’ sickness (and now death) bringing glory to God and Jesus. However, this enigma does not shake their faith. Instead of accusing Jesus of error, they interpret his words figuratively (vv. 23-24). Jesus’ words, however, are literal; they just can’t imagine him raising Lazarus from the dead. Now surely they know that he has raised Jairus’ daughter (Mt 9:18-25; Mk 5:21-43; Lk 8:40-56) and the widow’s son at Nain (Lk 7:11-17). But those “raisings” took place before rigor mortis set in. This is a qualitatively different miracle.

According to verse eleven, Jesus knew when Lazarus died. Perhaps he understood this by divine omniscience. It is also possible that this messenger was immediately sent back to Jesus to inform him of Lazarus’ death. They either invite Jesus to the funeral or tell him not to bother coming because it was now too late and/or too dangerous.

⁷Then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

Jn 11:7-10

⁸“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?”

⁹Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light. ¹⁰It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.”

The reason Jesus left Judea was because of the assassination attempt at the Feast of Dedication (Jn 10:31, 39-40; also 8:59). It is obviously dangerous to return. In fact, the next time Jesus goes to Jerusalem, in about two months, he will be executed. The disciples are aware of the danger and thus protest Jesus’ suggestion of returning to Judea.

Jesus responds with this enigma about twelve hours in a day. That was the length of the Jewish work day (cf. Mt 20:1-14). In other words, Jesus’ work for God is not yet finished (cf. 9:4). Until it is, no one is going to lay a finger on him (2:4; 7:6, 30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 17:1). Although Jesus is cautious not to get caught, because it is not “his time,” no one, even in Jerusalem, is going to prematurely kill him. Jesus is not the one in danger here. It is those who brazenly ignore God’s plan (i.e., walk in darkness) that get into trouble.

sent to Jesus. (2) He gets to Jesus two days later and informs him of Lazarus’ imminent death. (3) The servant returns to Bethany two days after Lazarus’ death with Jesus’ promise that Lazarus would not die (v. 4). (4) On the same day, Jesus and his disciples set out for Bethany. (5) They arrive two days later, when Lazarus has been dead four days (v. 17, 39).

Jn 11:11-16

¹¹After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

¹²His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” ¹³Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

¹⁴So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶Then Thomas (called Didymus⁵¹) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Again Jesus is misunderstood, not because his words are taken figuratively, but because they are taken literally. The disciples are glad Lazarus is sleeping. This is generally a good sign for recovery. But that's not the kind of sleep Jesus is talking about. By “sleep,” he means “death” (cf. Gen 47:30; 2 Sam 7:12; Mt 27:52; Acts 7:60; 1 Thess 4:13).⁵² That is especially appropriate for believers for whom death will be a happy experience (Ps 116:15; Lk 16:22; 23:43; Jn 14:2; Phil 1:21, 23; 2 Tim 4:6).

Because of the disciples' crass literalism, Jesus blurts out the coarse reality: *Lazarus is dead!* Jesus may seem insensitive, rejoicing over the death of a friend. But he is able to see the end from the beginning. He not only knows that he will bring Lazarus back to life, but that by doing so the disciples will gain new ground in their faith.

Thomas stands out as leader of the group. (This led Edersheim to speculate that Peter and his fishing partners took some time off while they were so close to Galilee to take care of family and business.) Aside from the four lists of Apostles (Mt 10:2-4; Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:14-16; Acts 1:13), Thomas is only mentioned two other times. After the resurrection, Thomas went fishing with Peter (Jn 21:2). And of course the most famous “Thomas passage,” is John 20:24-28, where he doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead, something that could also be said of the other ten Apostles prior to seeing Jesus. (See the comments in § 179 about the unfair term “Doubting Thomas.”)

This “Doubting Thomas” has enough faith to die with Jesus! He clearly understands the danger of Jesus returning to Judea and is willing to go stand by him in execution. Some have said that his confession was bogus because when it does come time to die with Jesus, he (and the others) ran away (Mt 26:56). But Peter said the same thing (Mt 26:35), and no one doubts his sincerity. Like most of us, Thomas' and Peter's intentions were better than their actions.

⁵¹A Greek word meaning “Twin.” We can only guess whether this was a literal description of Thomas.

⁵²As Hendriksen (p. 143) points out, the euphemism of “sleep” for “death” is not an adequate basis for the doctrine of “soul-sleep.” Although the soul is “asleep” to *this* world (Job 7:9, 10; Isa 63:16; Eccl 9:6), it is very much awake in its own world (Lk 16:19-31; 23:43; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:21-23; Rev 7:15-17; 20:4).

¹⁷On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸Bethany was less than two miles^a from Jerusalem, ¹⁹and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ,^b the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

^a 18 Greek *fifteen stadia* (about 3 kilometers) ^b 27 Or *Messiah*

When Jesus arrives, Mary and Martha are in their fourth day of mourning. For a Jew, mourning may last a full year. For the first day, of course, there is heavy mourning, which decreases incrementally on the third and seventh days. Mourning continues for twelve months but continues to get lighter until the end of the year, when it is stopped. They are joined by some of the prominent "Jews" from Jerusalem who would be more than a little familiar with Jesus, especially after the Feasts of Tabernacles and Dedication. No doubt many of these Jews are amiable to the "Jesus band" as are Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (v. 45). But some apparently are not (cf. v. 46).

When the rumor arrived that Jesus was on his way, Martha ran out to intercept him before he even came into town. She's not upset with Jesus but sad for Lazarus when she says, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." Yet even in her mourning, Jesus brings a sense of hope: "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you **ask**." This word "ask" is interesting. Hendriksen (pp. 148-149) says:

She used a word for prayer (*aiteō*, to ask) which Jesus never employed with reference to his own requests. The term which Martha used is proper upon the lips of an inferior asking a favor of a superior (4:9, 10; 14:13; 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, 26). The term which Jesus employed with respect to his own requests generally implies the equality of the two persons (*erotao*).

Jesus had sent the messenger back to Martha with the promise that Lazarus would not die and that through his sickness both he and God would be glorified. But Lazarus is now dead. She could not blame Jesus for not healing Lazarus. After all, the message had gotten to him too late. But the message Jesus sent back does not seem to gel with the fact that Lazarus has died. Therefore, Martha, unshaken in her faith in Jesus, interprets his words spiritually to mean that Jesus would raise up Lazarus on judgment day.

§ 118b
Lazarus is
Raised from
the Dead
(Jn 11:17-44)

Jesus is our hope on judgment day, and what a blessed hope he is! He is indeed the “Resurrection and the Life” (Jn 6:39-40, 44, 54; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:20-28; 2 Cor 4:14; see also Acts 4:2; 23:6; 24:15; Rom 6:5; 1 Cor 15:42; Phil 3:10-11; Rev 20:5-6). So here we have the fifth of Jesus’ “I AM” statements in John. It triggered something in Martha. She utters a confession of Christ that rivals even Peter’s great confession (Mt 16:16-18).

Confessions of Christ in John

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| John the Baptist | Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (1:29). |
| Andrew | We have found the Messiah (1:41). |
| Philip | We have found the one Moses wrote about (1:45). |
| Nathaniel | Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel (1:49). |
| Samaritans | This man really is the Savior of the world (4:42). |
| Simon Peter | You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God (6:68-69). |
| Martha | I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world (11:27). |

Martha’s hope and confession still fall short of what Jesus actually promises her. Ultimately Jesus’ gift of eternal life is far greater than a resuscitation of Lazarus’ life. But this miracle in John 11 is one of the important evidences that Jesus is, indeed, able to grant us eternal life. In other words, if he can raise Lazarus today, he can raise us in the future.⁵³

Jn 11:28-37 ²⁸And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.”

²⁹When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³²When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴“Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵Jesus wept.

³⁶Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

⁵³J.P. Martin suggests that Lazarus’ raising not only anticipates and verifies Jesus’ resurrection, but together, these two events assure John’s readers that they too will be raised on the last day. Thus, this story has strong eschatological and exhortational import aside from its historicity (“History and Eschatology in the Lazarus Narrative, John 11:1-44” *SJT* 17 [1964]: 332-343).

³⁷But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

It seems Mary is not aware that Jesus has come until Martha returns. She pulls Mary aside privately and informs her that Jesus has come. As we might suspect, she immediately bolts for the door. Her friends who had come from Jerusalem to console her are concerned when she runs out of the house so quickly. They follow her to see if she might need a shoulder to cry on or a strong arm to hold her. She leads them right to Jesus.

For whatever reasons, Jesus is still outside the city limits. Perhaps he is at the “graveyard.” Perhaps he was avoiding the popularity and danger that come with entering the city. Or perhaps he wants to have a private interview with Mary as he had with Martha. After all, Jesus had asked for her (v. 28).

When Mary arrives, she falls at his feet. She seems to be comfortable there (cf. Lk 10:39; Jn 12:3). She repeats verbatim the words of her sister. She too believes that Jesus could have healed her brother. How often, in the previous week, must these sisters have repeated these words to each other: “If only Jesus were here!” It is interesting that with the same words, Martha sparks Jesus into a theological discussion, but Mary moves his heart!

How the human is mixed with the divine in this text! Jesus knows that Lazarus is going to be alive again just moments from now. There will be laughter and celebration. But he is still caught up in the emotion of the moment. His dear friend is dead, and Mary lies crumpled at his feet in a puddle of tears. The commiserating crowd looks on her plaintively with sympathetic tears rolling down their own cheeks. Jesus is moved.

The two words used to describe Jesus’ emotions are strong. The first, *embri-maomai*, is generally used for anger, not sadness (Mt 9:30; Mk 1:43; 14:5). It literally means “to snort like a horse.” The second word, *tarassō*, means “to be stirred up” or “agitated.” It is used to describe a storm-tossed sea (Isa 24:14, LXX). Jesus isn’t just sad; he is bothered. We can only guess, but surely he is angered by death itself, as a result of the fall in Eden. Surely he is angry at Satan, not only for spoiling the pristine utopia of Eden, but for continuing to ravage the precious people who now surround him. And surely he is agitated by their lack of faith and understanding that the one who created life itself is standing before them. And some of these very Jews who now weep with Mary will rejoice over Jesus’ beaten body just two months from now, just two miles from here.

At Jesus’ request he is shown to the tomb of Lazarus. Again, a flood of emotion sweeps over our Lord as he is caught in the currents of humanity. Verse 35 records with such simplicity the profound reality of Jesus’ humanity: “Jesus wept.” Unlike the Jewish mourners, who wailed ostentatiously (some with dubious sincerity), Jesus’ tears are quiet and controlled (cf. Heb 5:7).⁵⁴ Yet they still

⁵⁴ The word used to describe Mary’s weeping (v. 31, 33) as well as the Jews’ (v. 33) is *klaio*, which indicates a “loud mournful cry.” The word used to describe Jesus’ weeping, *dakryo*, simply indicates the shedding of tears.

catch the attention of the crowd. They are an obvious indication of Jesus' affection for Lazarus. This crowd shares the sentiments of Mary and Martha: "It's a shame he wasn't here earlier. Surely he could have done something about this and saved us all this grief." Little do they know how lucky they are to be here now and how fortunate it is that Jesus was not here earlier.

Jn 11:38-44

³⁸Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹"Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

⁴⁰Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

⁴¹So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

⁴³When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Jesus stands before a cave, probably cut out of limestone.⁵⁵ A large stone has been rolled down into a "V" shaped groove in front of the opening to keep out scavengers. It would also serve to partially "trap" the stench of the decaying body inside. The spices and perfumes wrapped in linen strips around the body also helped. But even seventy-five pounds, which was not abnormal for an honorable burial (Jn 19:39), was not sufficient to cover up the odor. So when Jesus orders the stone to be removed, Martha protests. It would have been an offensive odor as well as an offensive action. One of the worst insults against a Jew would be to disturb his grave. Although moving the stone alone would not commit any such offense, it was a needless step in the wrong direction.

Jesus could remove the stone merely by speaking the word. He could empower Lazarus to kick it out of the way when he comes out of the tomb. The stone is not the barrier; it is their lack of faith, their unexpectant hearts. By having them remove the stone, he is eliminating two barriers at once.

Removing the stone is the first preparation for the miracle; his prayer is the second. He prays, not for his own benefit but for the crowd's. He doesn't ask God to perform this miracle, but thanks him for already having done it. This clarifies two important things: (1) *Jesus is sent from God*. God has granted him divine power and always listens to him. Jesus is not merely God's man, he is the God-Man. (2) *This miracle is evidence, not entertainment*. Lazarus is going to

⁵⁵Edersheim measures the average vault at about 6 feet wide, 9 feet deep, and 6 feet high. They generally had "niches" for eight bodies, three on each side and two at the back, opposite the entrance. They also often had smaller niches cut for ossuary boxes which contained the bones of family members after their bodies had fully decayed.

die again. These people will have to go through all this grief again. Although they appreciate having Lazarus back and are impressed with Jesus' power, if they don't accept him as Lord then they are missing the point.

Jesus calls out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" Perhaps the loud voice was so that Lazarus could hear him, being all wrapped up and stuffed in the back of a cave. That is unlikely, however, since Lazarus' soul is probably not even located in the decaying corpse at the moment. More likely Jesus shouts for the crowd, partially as a signal of authority and partially to be heard above the din of moans and snuffles.

Here he comes, wrapped from head to toe. Some have suggested that since his feet were bound that he could only have "hopped" out of the cave rather than walking out. That adds a bit of humor to the narrative. So does the fact that Jesus has to tell them to unwrap his head (so that he could breathe?).⁵⁶ One must wonder who was more surprised to see whom — Mary and Martha or Lazarus?

As the feeding of the 5,000 was the high point of the Galilean ministry, so the raising of Lazarus is the high point of the Judean ministry and a prelude to Jesus' own resurrection. "Each of the seven signs [of John] illustrates some particular aspect of Jesus' divine authority, but this one exemplifies his power over the last and most irresistible enemy of humanity — death" (Tenney, p. 114). Not only has Jesus raised him from the dead, he has reversed the effects of four days of decomposition. Furthermore, the Jews believed that the soul of the deceased person "hovers around the body for three days" (Hendriksen, p. 146) but then leaves when it sees that all hope is gone.

The crowds are predictably impressed. This will create a fervor which will peak at the Passover two months from now. People will be talking about it. They will want to see both Jesus and Lazarus, who, in our day, would surely be swamped with radio and TV talk-show interviews.

The raising of a dead man created quite a stir. The shock waves reached Jerusalem. They even rocked the inner sanctum of the Sanhedrin. Caiaphas spoke for the whole group when he said, "This guy has got to go." In fact, he prophesied for the entire nation. Jesus did have to die, but for very different reasons than this unwitting prophet suggested.

§ 119
**Sanhedrin's
Decision to
Assassinate
Jesus
(Jn 11:45-54)**

⁴⁵Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. ⁴⁶But some of them went to

Jn 11:45-48

⁵⁶Both the stone and the grave clothes serve to foreshadow Jesus' own resurrection. W.E. Reiser, "The Case for the Tidy Tomb: The Place of the Napkins of John 11:44 and 20:7" *HeyJ* 14 (1973): 47-57, says that the napkins not only connect the two events but contrast them. He suggests that for Lazarus, the napkin was a sign of death, for Jesus it was a sign of life and the key piece of evidence for John believing in Jesus' resurrection (Jn 20:6-8).

the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.⁴⁷ Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

"What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs.⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place^a and our nation."

^a48 Or temple

It is not surprising that many put their faith in Jesus, nor is it surprising that most of the leaders didn't. They all agreed that Lazarus' resuscitation was a momentous event that the religious authorities should know about. Not only was it of theological interest, it was of political interest. This miracle created a fervor among the crowds that could potentially be dangerous. The Romans kept a close watch on the Jews because they were prone to revolt. They had proved that a number of times in recent years. This gave the Sanhedrin all the more reason to arrest (Jn 7:30-32, 44-45; 10:39) and kill Jesus (Jn 5:18; 8:59; 10:31). It was simply an issue of national security.

So some of the eyewitnesses inform the "powers-that-be" in Jerusalem. They call an emergency session of the Sanhedrin. They come to three conclusions: (1) Jesus is doing many astounding miracles. (2) Their efforts to stop him have been miserable failures. Not only has he eluded their grasp (Jn 7:44-45; 8:59; 10:39), but more and more people are believing in him (Jn 7:31, 40-41; 8:30; 9:36; 10:19-21). (3) If they don't stop him the Romans will. Interestingly enough, Caiaphas' logic in forcefully stopping Jesus, will be reversed by Gamaliel who will advise this same Sanhedrin to let the Apostles alone lest they should find themselves fighting against God (Acts 5:38). Both Caiaphas and Gamaliel were likely in both meetings. One can't help but wonder what all went into this one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn.

The third conclusion was a sad misunderstanding of Jesus' mission. The common Jewish expectation was for an earthly, political Messiah. They wanted one who would throw off the shackles of Rome and regain Jewish independence (if not dominance). The Pharisees shared such an expectation and preached such a hope. But now that they see it coming, they don't want it at all. The risk of a bloody revolution is just too great. Furthermore, after all their grumbling against Rome, if the truth be told, they kind of like things just as they are. They don't want their authority to be challenged or stripped by some would-be Messiah.

This meeting of the Sanhedrin carries several insidious conclusions about its members. (1) They care more about their positions than they do about the kingdom of God. (2) They don't trust God to fight for them against an ominous enemy. (3) Their conclusions are wrong because they are thinking according to the flesh, not the spirit. (4) They are deceiving the Jewish populace, which thinks they are seeking the best interest of the people and the truth of the Scriptures. (5) They do not want the Messiah. They would obviously prefer to discredit Jesus' miracles and scriptural claims to messianic identity. But since they can't, they will abandon their own messianic hopes in lieu of their socio-political positions.

To make matters worse, this was all due to their misconception about the Messiah. Jesus' kingdom was not militaristic. Pilate saw that (Jn 18:33-38). Yet because of their hatred for Jesus, they came in direct confrontation with Rome through Pilate. And because of their execution of Jesus, they came in direct confrontation with God through Titus. In A.D. 70 the wrath of God demolished their city, even the holy temple, as Jesus predicted (Mt 24:2; Lk 21:20; 23:27-31). Because the temple was destroyed, animal sacrifices ceased. Thus the Sadducean party disbanded along with the Sanhedrin. In their attempt to save their positions and places, they destroyed them. This is part of the paradox of the kingdom (Mt 10:39).

⁴⁹Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." Jn 11:49-54

⁵¹He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, ⁵²and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. ⁵³So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

⁵⁴Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

Caiaphas reigned as High Priest from A.D. 18-36. He was the son-in-law of Annas, who reigned as High Priest from A.D. 7-14. Because the Jews accepted the High Priest for life, the populace still looked to Annas for leadership. This can be seen in the fact that Jesus' first trial was before Annas before he was taken to Caiaphas. But the Romans did not want any one individual becoming entrenched in power. That's why they frequently replaced the High Priest. This may be the meaning behind the words, "that year" (v. 49).

Caiaphas was a typical Sadducee — boisterous and rude.⁵⁷ Josephus (himself a Pharisee), has this to say of Sadducees:

The Pharisees are affectionate to each other and cultivate harmonious relations with the community. The Sadducees, on the contrary, are, even among themselves, rather savage in their conduct, and in their intercourse with their peers are as ungentle as they are to aliens (*War II:166*).

Caiaphas, as High Priest, prophesies without intending to (cf. 1 Pet 1:10-12). He is used by God in spite of himself. He would probably feel a little scandalized if he realized the true meaning of his words and just how right he was. Jesus' death will be for all the people of Israel. Not only that, John says that Jesus' blood cleansed the whole world (1 Jn 2:1-2)!

The secret plots of the Sanhedrin become more public. They begin, in

⁵⁷His behavior demonstrates his corrupt character: Mt 26:3, 57; Lk 3:2; Jn 11:49; 18:13, 14, 24, 28; Acts 4:6.

earnest, an organized effort to capture, convict, and kill Jesus. Someone (perhaps Nicodemus) sends a warning to Jesus. Consequently, he lays low in Ephraim for a while. Archaeologists have not been able to definitely locate Ephraim, but being near the wilderness, it would afford Jesus the opportunity for a “quick get-away.” The next two months will be marked by continuous travels and discussions along the road, until the time of his final encounter in Jerusalem. Jesus will keep himself secluded, primarily in rural areas, and keep moving so as to avoid the clutches of the Sanhedrin.

FINAL JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM



§ 120a
Healing the
Ten Lepers
(Lk 17:11-19)

Like Naaman of old, this Samaritan found healing from God’s prophet (2 Kgs 5:8-19). At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus said this kind of thing would happen (Lk 4:23-27). Like the Samaritans of John 4, this fellow finds the “savior of the world” and returns to worship him.⁵⁸

Lk 17:11-13

¹¹Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy^a met him. They stood at a distance ¹³and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

^a12The Greek word was used for various diseases affecting the skin—not necessarily leprosy

After raising Lazarus the Sanhedrin put an all-points bulletin out for Jesus. They wanted to capture him in the worst way. Jesus, knowing it was not yet his time, flees toward Galilee, laying low for a while in a village called Ephraim (Jn 11:54). Spring has sprung and it is time for Jesus’ final ascent to Jerusalem. Each of the synoptics mark this final teaching tour (Mt 19:1-2; Mk 10:1; Lk 17:11). Large crowds, including several significant women (Mk 15:40-41), follow Jesus from Ephraim down to Jerusalem. Undoubtedly they are headed to Jerusalem for the Passover feast.

Travelling between Galilee and Samaria, Jesus is about to enter one of these “border” villages, when he is hailed by a group of lepers. These nine Jews and one Samaritan share the same miserable fate (see comments on § 45). Were it not for their cursed disease, they would never be seen together.

Leviticus 14 is a vivid description of leprosy. It is not what we know as Hansen’s disease, which is a disease of the nervous system. Leprosy is an infectious skin disease. It was dreaded and incurable. In fact, barring an act of God, no one was ever cured of leprosy. To make matters worse, it was generally associated with sin in a person’s life. Therefore, lepers were banished from their communities. One of the legal restrictions of a leper was that he could not come

⁵⁸ D. Hamm, “What the Samaritan Leper Sees: The Narrative Christology of Luke 17:11-19,” *CBO* 56/2 (1994): 273-287.

close to a healthy person. And if a healthy person inadvertently came too close, the leper was obliged to shout, “Unclean! Unclean!” It was humiliating.

¹⁴When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”
And as they went, they were cleansed.

Lk 17:14-19

¹⁵One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

Jesus orders them to show themselves to the priests. After all, that was the law for ceremonial cleansing (Lev 14:8-11). It is interesting that Jesus does not immediately heal them. Rather, he waits until they have obeyed his command to go to the priests. In faith, they depart and are cleansed while on their way.

It seems a shame that the only thing holding this group together is leprosy. They can only be friends in illness. Once they are healed, the Samaritan leaves the others. He certainly isn’t going to show himself to a Jewish priest! He has his own priest to go to. So, instead of continuing with his nine ex-comrades, he returns to thank Jesus.

Now, the nine are doing just what they were told. They are obeying Jesus as well as the Law. They are doing what is right. However, the Samaritan is doing what is better. That’s a tough distinction for Christians as well. Often we are motivated to do what is right, to obey, and to fulfill God’s laws. There is certainly nothing wrong with that. But the “better” is to worship Jesus. Again, we see a distinction between ritual and relationship. It is possible to do all the right things and still miss Jesus.

This passage is essentially the same material as we have in Matthew 24 but given in a completely different setting. It is a different time, a different audience, and a different question is asked. In Matthew 24, the Apostles ask about the beautiful buildings in the temple (cf. Lk 21:5-38). Here it is the Pharisees who question Jesus, not about the temple, but about the kingdom. That is a difficult concept since the kingdom comes in stages. The kingdom was present with Jesus’ first appearance (Lk 11:20; 17:21). The kingdom came on the day of Pentecost (Mk 9:1; 16:28). It comes as a millennial kingdom (Rev 20:4). And it will be finally and completely manifest in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-6).

§ 120b
**The Coming of
the Kingdom
and the Son of
Man
(Lk 17:20-37)**



Locating which stage Jesus is talking about is sometimes difficult. Even more so, since Matthew 24 deals predominantly with the destruction of Jerusalem which took place in A.D. 70 (cf. Lk 21:5-38). But here, that does not seem to be the message, even though it uses much of the same language. It appears that similar illustrations and examples were given to describe two dif-

ferent events. That is a little confusing, but not so uncommon in biblical prophecy.

Jesus is asked two questions about the kingdom by two different groups. First the Pharisees ask, “*When* will the kingdom come?” Later in the discussion, his own disciples ask “*Where* the kingdom comes.”

 Lk 17:20-21

²⁰Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,²¹nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within^a you.”

^a21Or among

The Pharisees are as interested in the kingdom as the “Jesus band” is. By and large, both groups shared similar expectations of the Messianic kingdom. It was to be: (1) Political — the Messiah would vanquish all foes of Israel (especially the Romans) with military power. (2) Prosperous — there would be incredible, even divine wealth given to every citizen of Israel. (3) Visible — it was to be announced in a fantastic, loud, flashy manner so that all could see and join in the celebration.

Jesus refers to this third point when he says, “It does not come with ‘careful observation’” (i.e., visible signs). It is not going to be something you can observe as a sky rocket or a ticker-tape parade. Unfortunately, their concept was entirely wrong because they were looking for an earthly rather than a spiritual kingdom.

Because the kingdom is spiritual and not physical, it is internal, not external (i.e., “within you”). However, this phrase can also be translated “among you” or even “within your grasp.”⁵⁹ That is probably what Jesus has in mind considering he is speaking to the Pharisees who hardly have the purpose, nature, and heart of the kingdom within them. Thus, Jesus implies that he himself is the manifestation of the kingdom of God even as he stands in their midst. They can accept him if they want to. In other words, the Pharisees ask, “When comes the kingdom?” Jesus answers, “Here I am, standing in your midst, available for the asking.”

 Lk 17:22-29

²²Then he said to his disciples, “The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it.²³Men will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them.²⁴For the Son of Man in his day^a will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.²⁵But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

²⁶Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

²⁸It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and

⁵⁹H.J. Cadbury, “The Kingdom of God and Ourselves,” *ChrCen* 67 (1950): 172-173 and C.H. Roberts, “The Kingdom of Heaven (Lk 17:21)” *HTR* 41/1 (1948): 1-8.

selling, planting and building. ²⁹But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.”

^a24 Some manuscripts do not have *in his day*.

The conversation now shifts from the Pharisees to the disciples but the topic remains the same: “When will all this take place?” Although Jesus, in their midst, represents the presence of the kingdom, the full manifestation of the kingdom will not come until after the passion of Christ (v. 25). Was it fulfilled in Jesus’ resurrection? No, because he only appeared to a few and did not manifest himself as lightning flashes across the sky (v. 24). This must refer to the Second Coming. That’s consistent with Matthew 24. There Jesus’ illustrations about lightning and Noah also refer to his return.

From the days of the Apostles until the present time, there have been people claiming to be the Christ or to have seen the Christ. Even by the time Luke wrote his Gospel, there were rumors that Jesus had already come (2 Thess 2:1-2). It is so tempting to follow them because we want so badly to see the inauguration of King Jesus (v. 22). But we ought not be duped into chasing after them. When Jesus comes, it is going to be as obvious as lightning that flashes from one end of the sky to the other (v. 24).

These verses set the eschatological clock for the rest of the chapter. That is, we are now looking at the Second Coming of Christ. It has many parallels to the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 21:5-38), but it is seen here in its own context.

All the verbs in vv. 27 and 28 are imperfect, indicating continued past action. In other words, life went on as it had in the past. People were continually involved in life’s normal events. As in the days of Noah, it will be business as usual. Just as they were surprised by the flood, people will be caught suddenly by the coming of Christ. As in the days of Lot, life will proceed as it normally does. Just as they were surprised by the fire and brimstone, people will be caught suddenly by the coming of Christ. Jesus will come suddenly and unexpectedly (1 Thess 5:2-3; 2 Pet 3:8-10).

³⁰^aIt will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. Lk 17:30-33
³¹On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. ³²Remember Lot’s wife! ³³Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.”

The theme of “suddenness” continues. Jesus is going to return so suddenly that you won’t even have time to collect your possessions. Those who love Christ will not need them. Those who do not love Christ, will not be spared by them.

Thus we hear warning number one in verses 30-31: Jesus will come so suddenly that you won’t have time to gather your possessions. Now we hear warning number two in verses 32-33: The love of your possessions may keep you out

of the coming kingdom. Lot's wife loved her city. By looking back to it during its destruction, she lost her salvation. That same principle is now applied to the Second Coming of Christ. Those who love this present world will have no place in the kingdom of Christ.

Jesus summarizes these two warnings with his most frequently cited saying: "Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it." Earlier this was applied in an ethical sense to the cost of discipleship (Mt 10:39). Here the application is quite concrete, referring to our love of possessions. The principle is the same: You must make a choice about your allegiance. Will it be to Christ or to this world? This is the disciple's key question from the time we come to Christ until the time he comes to us.

Lk 17:34-37

³⁴[¶] tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵[¶]Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.^a

³⁷[¶]"Where, Lord?" they asked.

He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

^a35 Some manuscripts left. ³⁶[¶]Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.

Jesus' return will come suddenly. With it will come some very sharp divisions in the home and on the job. There will surely be many homes where everyone is saved and many shops where everyone is lost. But the point is that one Christian can't save the whole house. There will be a painfully discriminating judgment when Jesus returns. Therefore, he calls us to be committed to him above our possessions.⁶⁰

The idea of judgment is always connected with the Second Coming. Here it is taken out of the courtroom and put onto the battlefield. The picture Jesus paints is a field of carnage, with slain bodies strewn across it, dotted with scurrying vultures, feasting on the carrion. Where there is a dead body, there is a vulture (cf. Mt 24:28). Likewise, where there is sin there will be judgment. The disciples ask, "Where, Lord? . . . Where will the kingdom manifest itself in judgment?" Jesus replies, "Anywhere and everywhere." It's a PG-13 picture for sure. Jesus paints it again, even more vividly, for John in the book of Revelation:

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. . . . The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

⁶⁰ Verse 36 is absent in the oldest Greek manuscripts and thus omitted from most modern translations. It reads, "Two will be in the field; one shall be taken and the other shall be left" (cf. Mt. 24:40). Its inclusion or exclusion makes no real difference in our understanding of the text.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.” . . . The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh (Rev 19:11, 14-18, 21).

Jesus continues his trek from Ephraim to Jerusalem with a rather large entourage. As they walk along, Jesus teaches. On one such occasion, he gives two parables about prayer. The first is directed at his disciples. The point is clear: Pray and do not give up! The second parable is directed at the self-righteous Pharisees. The point is equally clear: Prayer that is self-confident and critical is ineffective with God.

¹Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. Lk 18:1

§ 121
Two Parables
on Prayer
(Lk 18:1-14)



Right up front Luke gives us the meaning of this parable. That's pretty unusual but it punctuates the importance of persistent petition. We must, however, realize the context of the passage. Jesus has just finished talking about his Second Coming. He has just told his disciples that they would "long for one of his days" (17:22). It is prayer — constant, persistent prayer — that will sustain the disciples of Jesus as they wait for his return. We must "not give up." Sure, it can be tiring as we labor and wait. Persistent prayer is the tool Jesus offers to sustain misunderstood and mistreated disciples (cf. 1 Thess 5:17).

²He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. ³And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

Lk 18:2-5

"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"

The parable opens with a villain — an unjust judge. Edersheim (II: 287) describes these village judges as something like the old marshal. They were appointed by the Romans as peace-keeping forces in the smaller towns. They were often corrupt, taking bribes and vying for political position. In walks this widow. That was unusual. In those days, women didn't go to court themselves. They would be represented by a male advocate. But this poor widow has no one willing to plead her case — no husband, no sons, no in-laws. Against proper etiquette, in humiliation, this widow pesters the judge to act as her advocate. She is utterly alone and in serious danger (cf. Mk 12:40; Lk 20:47). Her only hope is

an unjust judge. Now that's a pathetic picture.⁶¹ Although her chances of obtaining justice are slim, it's her only shot. So she keeps at it persistently. Eventually her opportunity prevails.

Widows were marginal figures in ancient Israel. Because they had nothing to lose, they could afford persistent petitions. Day after day, they could cry out for justice. In fact, that was often the social role they played. They were not viewed as relentless nags. Rather they were teachers of the community. They showed Israel that victory was not in the power of the monarch but in the persistence of the marginalized.⁶²

The word translated “wear me out,” literally means “to strike someone under the eye.” We would say, “She gave him a black eye.” It is used figuratively in the sense of “putting him to shame.”⁶³ Her persistence scandalizes the judge in several ways. (1) It demonstrates that he is not doing his job, which may hinder his further promotion. (2) She shows that he is unjust, which will sully his reputation in the community. (3) She takes up enormous amounts of his precious time. Even though he fears not God, nor does he respect the opinions of men, the price tag for putting off this woman is just too high and getting higher by the minute.

Lk 18:6-8 ⁶And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

How can this scallywag represent God in this parable? Is Jesus saying that we will get what we want from God if we pester him through prayer? NO! This is a parable of *contrast*, not *comparison*. What Jesus is saying is that if the unjust judge will give in through persistent petition, how much more will a loving Father eagerly grant the requests of his beloved “chosen ones” (v. 7, cf. Mt 24:22; Rom 8:33; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 17:14)? The point of the story is not that we pester God with prayer until he gives in. The point is that we *are not* pestering God when we pray and so we should not give up.

This would have come as a bit of a shock to Jesus’ audience. Jewish theology considered it a bit offensive to “nag” God with our needs.⁶⁴ But Jesus told us to do it. Remember the “ask, seek, knock” stuff?⁶⁵ Then he gave us a couple

⁶¹ The Bible consistently exhorts God’s people to take care of widows (Exod 22:22-24; Deut 10:18; 24:17; 27:19; Job 24:3, 21; Isa 1:17; 10:2; Jer 22:3; Mal 3:5; Mk 12:40; Acts 6:1; 9:41; 1 Tim 5:13-15; Jas 1:27) precisely because they are so vulnerable.

⁶² Cf. V. Matthews and D. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), pp. 132-141.

⁶³ J.D.M. Derrett, “Law in the NT: The Unjust Judge,” *NTS* 18 (1971-72): 178-191.

⁶⁴ Talmud *Berakh* 3.6; 31a.

⁶⁵ These three commands are present imperatives, indicating continued action. This is all the more striking since Jesus overwhelmingly used aorist imperatives when teaching on prayer.

of parables to illustrate how to pray persistently (Lk 11:5-8; 18:1-8). As if that was not enough, Jesus showed us how himself (Mk 14:35-42).

Jesus promises that our prayers will be answered. We will receive justice, and receive it quickly. This does not necessarily mean “immediately” but “in a short span of time.” Just wait until Jesus returns (17:29-37; cf. Rev 22:20). It could happen at anytime. And when it does happen it will be swift. Hicks helps with his translation of v. 7: “Will not God vindicate his elect who cry unto him day and night even though he appears to delay over them?”⁶⁶ We’re gonna have to wait for that day. But mark my words, it will come. Until then, you keep praying!

When Jesus comes, will he find faith? Again, we observe that Jesus is speaking of prayer in relation to his Second Coming. Sure we have to wait. We cannot speed up God’s timetable through prayer. But we do consistently recognize his loving care in our lives. The question Jesus asks is, “Will you be faithful in prayer until I return? Will you make it?” This question is unanswered until this day. It may be the only question that we are able to answer better than Jesus. It is up to us. Will we be faithful until the return of our Lord? Surely if this widow could persist with this unreliable, unpredictable, unrighteous judge, we can persist with a loving God who always keeps his word.

⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood up and prayed about^a himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’”

Lk 18:9-12

^a11 Or *to*

Jesus has just spoken about the unrighteous judge. Now he contrasts this self-righteous worshiper with a repentant sinner. The Pharisees considered themselves worthy of God’s grace. They believed that by their religious performance, they earned the right to make demands of God and to demean others (cf. vv. 18-30; Mt 23:5-7; Mk 7:6; Phil 3:4-6).

The Pharisee “prayed about himself” (or more accurately, “Prayed TO himself”). The reason this man leaves the temple without his prayer answered is that he prays to himself and not to God. He never asks for anything. All he really does is report how wonderful he is (using the pronoun “I” five times in his prayer) and reports how awful this publican is. He can easily catalogue his ritual prowess. He fasted twice a week and meticulously tithed a tenth (cf. 11:42). The Pharisees fasted on Mondays and Thursdays. The law only required one fast a year (cf. Lev 26:29; Num 29:7). However, the market convened on these days and thus people came to town. Special synagogue services were held and the Sanhedrin convened. It was the perfect time to attract attention.

⁶⁶J.M. Hicks, “The Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8),” *RestQ* 33 (1991): 209-223.

This was (is) the typical attitude of the Pharisee. Rabbi Simeon ben Jochai said, “If there are only two righteous men in the world, I and my son are these two; if there is only one, I am he!”

Lk 18:13-14 ^{13⁴⁴}But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

^{14⁴⁴}I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The tax collector is a study in contrast. He stands at a distance, recognizing his own unworthiness before God. He refuses to assume the normal posture for Jewish prayer — standing, looking up to heaven. This man, like a scolded child, is not even willing to look into his father’s eyes. While the Pharisee stands at a distance browbeating this tax collector, he beats himself on the chest. Instead of praying to himself, he prays to God. His petition is simple, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” The Greek text has a definite article and should be read “THE sinner.” Whereas the Pharisee elevates himself as a righteous man, the publican elevates himself as THE sinner.

Both men get what they sincerely asked for. The publican is justified. The Pharisee gets NOTHING. That’s exactly what he asks for and exactly what he thinks he needs. It may be difficult for us to feel the impact of this story because we have already been prepared by Luke to feel compassion for the least and the lost (5:12, 27; 7:34, 37; 15:1-2; 16:20), and disdain for the Pharisee (5:17; 6:2, 7; 7:39; 11:37-54; 15:2; 16:14).⁶⁷ But in Jesus’ day, the “reversal” of this parable would be shocking. So too in our day, we might feel scandalized if we truly understood whose prayers God really respects.

§ 122
Divorce,
Remarriage,
Celibacy
(Mt 19:1-12;
Mk 10:1-12;
cf. Lk 16:18)

As Jesus continues his trek to Jerusalem the crowds get thicker. The Pharisees, always lurking in the background, come to the front with a question. They aren’t looking for an answer but an opportunity. They want to trip Jesus up with this sticky wicket of divorce. It was as much of a hot button back then as it is today. Everyone stops. All ears are opened; all eyes are on Jesus. His words are typically stunning. He applies to men, for the first time, the same absolute restrictions on divorce that had always applied to women. This offers women unparalleled protection from the ravages of men who, like these Pharisees, want to have their cake and eat it too.

⁶⁷In Luke’s characterization, the Pharisees and tax collectors are binary opposites (3:12-13; 5:27-30; 7:34; 15:1; 18:11-13; 19:2,10). Culturally, the Pharisees wore white hats while the tax collectors wore black hats. But Luke always has them switched (cf. A.M. Okorie, “The Characterization of Tax Collectors in the Gospel of Luke,” *CurTM* 22/1 [1995]: 27-32).

¹When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan.
²{Again^{MK}} Large crowds followed him, {and as was his custom, he taught them^{MK}} and he healed them there.

Mt 19:1-3
with Mk 10:1

³Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

Since his second year of ministry, every time Jesus attracts a crowd he also attracts Pharisees. They are not disciples, they are informants — obvious enemies. This is even more true since the Sanhedrin openly plotted to kill Jesus (Jn 11:53) and put out a “warrant” for his arrest not more than a month ago (Jn 11:57). That’s what sent Jesus to this area in the first place (Jn 11:54; Lk 17:11).

Their question is designed to trap Jesus (cf. Mt 16:1; Mk 10:2; Lk 11:53). Divorce was a raging debate. In fact, the Talmud devotes an entire chapter to it, entitled *Gittin*. Jesus brought up the subject in Judea a couple of months earlier but there was apparently no opportunity to debate the issue then (Lk 16:14, 18). Now that the Pharisees have finally caught up with Jesus, they accost him with this issue. This time it is open for discussion.

The Pharisees’ opinions on divorce were divided into two camps. One followed Hillel, the other Shammai (both of whom had been dead for several decades). Hillel said that a man could divorce his wife if she displeased him for almost any reason.⁶⁸ In fact, Akiba, a disciple of Hillel, goes so far as to say that a man could divorce his wife if he found a better looking woman (*Gittin* 9:10).⁶⁹ Shammai, on the other hand, said one could only divorce his wife for a serious sexual offense. No matter what Jesus answers, half of the crowd will likely be furious.

Shammai’s view is closer to Jesus’ than Hillel’s. But the two are still miles apart. First of all, Shammai’s theology of divorce is based on Deuteronomy 24:1-4, whereas Jesus’ is based on Genesis 1-2. Second, Shammai deals with only the legal permission for men, whereas Jesus deals with the spiritual obligations of both men and women. Third, only Jesus places restrictions on remarriage, which the Jews would have seen as a nearly absolute right.

We should also note that it was this very issue which caused John the Baptist to lose his head (Mt 14:3-12). The Pharisees meet Jesus on John’s old “stompin’ ground” (cf. Jn 10:40-41; Lk 17:11). If they can just get him to say the same things that John did, perhaps Jesus will fall to the same fate as his predecessor. That would please these Pharisees.

⁶⁸Valid reasons for divorce according to the Hillelites would include (1) burning a husband’s dinner (*Gittin* 90a), (2) going out in public with her head uncovered, (3) talking with men, (4) spinning in the public streets, (5) speaking disrespectfully of her in-laws in front of her husband, (6) being troublesome or quarrelsome, (7) not bearing children within ten years (Edersheim, II:333-334).

⁶⁹Josephus, who was also a Pharisee and a divorcee, was in the Hillelite camp. He believed that divorce was permissible for almost any reason (*Ant.* 4.253).

Mt 19:4-6

⁴“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female.’^a ⁵and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’^b? ⁶So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

^a4 Gen 1:27; 5:2 ^b5 Gen 2:24

Jesus never backed down from a good fight. They challenge him with a most difficult and touchy issue and he jumps in feet first with his fists up. His opening retort, “Haven’t you read” (cf. Mt 12:3, 5; 21:16, 42; 22:31; Mk 12:10, 26), would be offensive to these Bible scholars who had likely not just read but memorized much of the Torah.

Their theology of divorce is based on the hagglings of oral tradition grounded in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. But Jesus, with typical clarity, goes clear back to the beginning and God’s design for a man and a woman. First, he states that God designed a man and a woman to be married to each other (citing Gen 1:27 verbatim from the LXX). They belong together physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Second, the marriage bond involves two things: “Leaving and Cleaving” (Gen 2:24, also from the LXX). Leaving father and mother, in the Biblical world, was not necessarily setting up a separate household. In fact, that would have been a rare thing, at least in the days of the Patriarchs. Rather, “leaving” meant changing your primary commitments. Mom and Dad no longer receive primary loyalty. The second part of the marriage bond involves becoming one flesh. Although this is not exclusively sexual intercourse, there is no greater picture of physical union than this.⁷⁰ Thus marriage is pictured as a covenant (Prov 2:17) which stands on two pillars: (a) commitment and (b) oneness — intimate faithfulness. If either of these is destroyed, the marriage breaks down.

Based upon these two pillars God “joins” a couple. Jesus uses a word that means “yoked together” [*synezeuksen*]. Thus, they become life-partners, co-laborers. This is God’s design from the Garden. It is not particularly Jewish or Christian, it is human. This is God’s “creation ordinance”: One man with one woman for life.

Mt 19:7-8

⁷⁴“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?” [Deut 24:1-4].

⁸Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”

⁷⁰Sexual intercourse, in and of itself, does not constitute a marriage. A marriage requires both intimacy (consummated in sexual intercourse) and commitment. Although 1 Cor 6:16 affirms that sexual intercourse with a prostitute creates a bond that transcends physical contact, it does not go so far as to say that the couple becomes husband and wife. If it did, then Jesus would have been mistaken when he told the woman at the well that the man she was living with was not her husband (Jn 4:18). That is precisely why intercourse outside of marriage is so dangerous. It creates a unity between two people without a commitment of the couple. The consequences are often devastating.

The Pharisees debated the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. But they mishandled the text. For starters, Moses did not “command” that a man divorce his wife. Rather, he forbade a man from marrying the same woman twice. This was primarily for the protection of the woman. In such a male-dominated society, women were treated as property. This law would keep a man from too quickly dismissing a wife just because they got in a fight. If he lets her go, it is for keeps. He can’t snatch her back like a child swapping baseball cards.

The primary question in the Hillel versus Shammai debate is the meaning of “something indecent.” Literally, it means “nakedness” or “exposure” specifically of the genitals (and most often in reference to women). It probably does not refer merely to adultery, for the law prescribed the death penalty for adultery (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22). One hardly needs to divorce a dead woman. And even though the Jews seldom executed people for adultery (especially in NT times), it would be rather incongruous for Moses to establish such a double standard within the written law itself. On the other hand, “something indecent” certainly must mean more than “being ugly” or “being a bad cook” as the Hillelites applied it. It seems reasonable to assume that “something indecent” covers a range of sexual sins including adultery. This would be true for both the Hebrew word and Jesus’ application of it, translated with the Greek word *porneia*. Thus, a serious sexual sin breaks the “one flesh” pillar of the marriage covenant.

Back to the Pharisees’ question. Although Moses did not *command* divorce, his regulations did *de facto permit* it. Now, Moses is not advocating divorce. Rather, he is regulating it. He can’t stop it, but he can put some parameters around it. Without legal guidelines, women and children⁷¹ were especially vulnerable to the ravages of what Jesus calls “hard hearts.”⁷²

⁹“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery {against her. MK}

Mt 19:9 with
Mk 10:11

¹²“And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.

Mk 10:12

¹⁸“And the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Lk 16:18

This is a most difficult text for a number of reasons. But before dealing with the text itself, we ought to set some parameters around our explanation of this text. First, this is a debate between Jesus and the Pharisees. The question, designed to trap Jesus, is specifically about a husband divorcing a wife.⁷³

⁷¹Perhaps it is only a coincidence, but it seems significant that the next two pericopes following this teaching on divorce deal with children and money, both critical issues where divorce is concerned.

⁷²God allowed divorce legislation to accommodate the hard hearts of his people. In much the same way God permitted a monarchy and the building of a temple even though these were not his original intentions either.

⁷³In Jewish circles, it was nearly unheard of that a woman would divorce her husband. In Greco-

Therefore we should probably be as cautious about making universal absolutes from this narrative as we are with other “debate” texts.⁷⁴

Second, when Matthew writes this, the ink is hardly dry from 18:18-35, dealing with forgiving an erring brother and confronting an unrepentant brother. Divorce, although a highly personal issue, must not be dealt with alone. Christians are part of a body. Therefore, a couple heading toward divorce have an obligation to seek counsel and support from the broader Christian fellowship to which they are joined.

Third, we must balance both solid exegesis and realistic application. Although the text must reign supreme over our opinions, reason, and culture, any explanation of the text which leads to oppression, bigotry, or legalism is suspect. It is our job not only to explain the text accurately but to apply it with sensitivity. That being said, this verse confronts us with at least two major questions:

1. Is Jesus giving permission to divorce if your spouse is unfaithful?

Some say “NO!” This “exception clause” is found only in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. Some suggest that Matthew would not contain an exception clause which Mark and Luke didn’t have because then Matthew’s recipients would be allowed to divorce but Luke and Mark’s audience would not. However, among the Greeks and Romans, to whom Mark and Luke primarily wrote, it was universally assumed that adultery was adequate grounds for divorce. It just went without saying. In other words, Matthew explicitly states what Mark and Luke can assume.

Furthermore, if we look closely at Matthew 5:32, it doesn’t actually say that adultery is permission for divorce. It merely says that if a man divorces his wife he forces her to become an adulteress, unless, of course, she had already been involved in adultery. In other words, if she is already an adulteress, you can’t make her one. That logic works well for Matthew 5:32.⁷⁵ But it doesn’t hold up in Matthew 19:9. Here it is the man who commits adultery by divorcing his wife.

Based on this, we can confidently say that Jesus grants permission, without obligation, to divorce an “unfaithful” spouse. But just what exactly is this “unfaithfulness?” The word used in both Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 is *porneia*. It at least means “adultery” [*moichos*].⁷⁶ But it may mean more. Like its OT counter-

Roman circles, however, it was more common. This is probably why Mark includes his words (10:12), stating that what goes for the man also goes for the woman. It would be more applicable to Mark’s audience than to Matthew’s.

⁷⁴C. Blomberg cautions that “Few try to make the pronouncements in various other controversy or pronouncement stories absolute (cf., e.g., Matt 19:21; 9:15, and esp. 13:57, a particularly interesting parallel because of its similar exception clause . . .), so one should be equally wary of elevating 19:9 (or Mark 10:11-12) into an exceptionless absolute” (“Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage and Celibacy: An Exegesis of Matthew 19:3-12” *TrinJ* 11NS [1990]: 162).

⁷⁵However, P. H. Wiebe, “Jesus’ Divorce Exception,” *JETS* 32/3 (1989): 327-333, shows that linguistically the exception clause can modify either phrase, “Whoever divorces his wife” or “causes her to commit adultery.” Hence, even in Mt 5:32, it could be taken as a valid exception for divorce.

⁷⁶*porn-* root words are used much more commonly for women’s sexual misconduct than for men’s.

part [*'ervah*] in Deut 24:1, *porneia* can cover a range of sexual sins. These could include coitus, indecent exposure, homosexuality, molestation, incest, etc. But it would have to be of such a serious nature as to breach the “oneness” of the marital covenant.

But is sexual infidelity the only valid reason for divorce? No. Paul clearly adds another in 1 Corinthians 7:15. If an unbelieving spouse abandons a Christian, the believer is to let him/her go. If a Christian is abandoned by a fellow believer, however, (s)he is to remain celibate and strive for reconciliation (1 Cor 7:11). One might assume that the Christian abandoned by a nonbeliever should also remain celibate (1 Cor 7:8), unless the sexual temptation is too great to withstand (1 Cor 7:9). Obviously a second marriage is preferable to fornication.

In conclusion, there are two valid reasons for divorce: (1) Sexual unfaithfulness, which destroys the first pillar of the marriage covenant — “Oneness.” (2) Abandonment by an unbelieving spouse, which destroys the second pillar of the marriage covenant — “Commitment.” Are there other instances in which Jesus would approve of divorce besides abandonment or adultery? Some confidently say, “Yes.”⁷⁷ If there are, however, they would have to be serious enough to irreparably damage one of the two pillars of the marriage covenant. Some have suggested that physical abuse, sexual deviancy, insanity, Alzheimer’s, extended comatose, alcoholism/drug addiction, etc., might fall into this category. But we need to be cautious here.

While recognizing that neither Jesus’ nor Paul’s discussions are designed to handle all the complexities and possibilities of divorce, they do set God’s parameters on this issue. On the one hand, we must be faithful with what the Scripture teaches. On the other hand, we must apply this teaching with sensitivity, compassion, and reason. So, based on the context of Matthew 18:15-35, we offer this caution against dealing too lightly with divorce. Although there may be more valid reasons for divorce than the two mentioned by Jesus and Paul, that is *not* an individual decision. When a couple is experiencing marital difficulty, they have an obligation to the body to seek counsel and prayer. A couple embroiled in conflict will almost invariably magnify their problem(s) and too quickly conclude that their differences are irreconcilable. At that point, godly Christian leaders are probably able to make better decisions than the couple. Since divorce affects the whole body, it hardly seems right for it to be a private decision.

Divorce is always bad (Mal 2:16). It should be recognized as a personal failure and a spiritual defeat. But sometimes in a fallen world we find ourselves with a set of poor options. We don’t have the luxury of choosing between good

This may explain why Jesus uses *porneia* here rather than the more specific word for adultery, *moicheia*.

⁷⁷R.H. Stein, “Is It Lawful For a Man to Divorce His Wife?” *JETS* 22/2 (1979): 115-121 and M. J. Molldrem, “A Hermeneutic of Pastoral Care and the Law/Gospel Paradigm Applied to the Divorce Text of Scripture,” *Int* 45 (1991): 43-54.

and bad but merely between the lesser of two evils. There are times when divorce is a more reasonable, healthy option than remaining married. But we must weigh our options carefully and only accept divorce as a last resort when all other options have failed.

2. Who is guilty of adultery in divorce and remarriage?

Jesus is not saying that divorce is the act of adultery. Rather, he says divorce is *like* adultery. That is, they both break the marriage covenant. It is a metaphor.⁷⁸ Jesus often used such figures of speech. For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus first introduced this teaching on divorce (5:32), he surrounded it with other metaphors: Anger = murder; Lust = adultery; “gouge out your right eye;” salt & light, etc.

The woman becomes an adulteress through no apparent fault of her own (Mt 5:32). How? A divorced woman in Jesus' day had few options. The fortunate remarried. The unfortunate were forced into prostitution. Both of these options would include sexual activity which could be labeled “adultery.” But what about the woman who remains celibate (perhaps supported by a family member)? If she has not slept with another man either prior to or after the divorce, it is unfair to call her an adulteress. However, she is *treated* like an adulteress and she suffers the same privation and rejection that adulteresses often experience. So for all *practical* purposes, her ex-husband forces her to become an adulteress even though she has not committed the crime.

So how is divorce like adultery? Divorce destroys the pillar of “commitment” in marriage. Adultery destroys the pillar of “oneness” in marriage. Either way, the marriage is shot. Thus, both divorce and adultery have the same terrible consequence. Hence, divorce is just as bad as adultery. Now that would come as a shock to these persnickety Pharisees who would never commit adultery but felt perfectly free to divorce whimsically. Furthermore, remarriage, which these fellows felt was their God-given right, destroys any glimmer of hope for reconciliation. Thus, remarriage is also like adultery.⁷⁹ Divorce, adultery, and remarriage all three separate what God has joined together.

Does this mean that remarriage is sinful? The early church unanimously responded with a resounding “Yes!” But what would Jesus say? If all attempts at reconciliation have failed, then it might not be sin. It is never ideal. It is a mark of moral failure. It bears the burden of past brokenness. But where divorce is concerned we have no good options. We are sometimes forced, therefore, to choose between the lesser of two evils. That doesn’t mean the second marriages won’t be good. But they can never be ideal. Paul would like for all singles to

⁷⁸ “Adultery” was often used metaphorically in the OT for “idolatry” (Hos 2:4; 4:12; Jer 5:7; Ezek 16:32; 23:37).

⁷⁹ All parties involved commit adultery: (1) The man who divorces his wife (Mt 19:9), (2) the woman who divorces her husband (Mk 10:12), (3) the woman who is divorced by her husband (Mt 5:32), and (4) the man who marries a divorced woman (Mt 5:32).

remain celibate. But he knows that many can't handle it (1 Cor 7:8-9). In that case, remarriage is a better option than fornication. In addition, where children are concerned, two parents are generally better than one.

But if a couple remarries, will they not be living in continual adultery? NO! Remarriage is not adultery, it is adultery-like. That is, it puts a nail in the coffin of the first marriage. The "adultery" is tied to the divorce, not the sexual union of the second couple.⁸⁰ Some, however, would suggest that because the Greek phrase "commits adultery" is in the present tense, that it means that the couple continues to commit adultery as long as they live together. However, the present tense verb means no more in Greek than it does in English. It simply indicates an event that occurs without any clear indication as to whether it continues or not.⁸¹ Furthermore, the implication of such an idea is atrocious.

If second-marriage couples are living in a continued state of adultery, then the only solution would be to dissolve that second marriage and seek reconciliation of the first marriage. This may imply (1) committing adultery through a second divorce, (2) dissolving a good marriage to seek a near impossible reconciliation of a bad marriage, (3) traumatizing two relationships, (4) and dividing children of a second marriage.

Furthermore, Jesus recognized the validity of multiple marriages (Jn 4:18), without either approving of them or accusing them of being mere adultery. So did Moses (Deut 24:1-4). We should do the same. This is especially true of those who come to Christ as divorcees (1 Cor 7:17). Destroying a second marriage in a futile attempt to reconcile a first marriage hardly seems a step in the right direction.

{¹⁰When they were in the house again^{MK}} ¹⁰The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

Mt 19:10-12
with Mk 10:10

¹¹Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹²For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage^a because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

^a12Or have made themselves eunuchs

The sanctity of marriage and the call to celibacy after divorce is serious stuff. So once they resort to the privacy of their host's house, the disciples question Jesus about this. Perhaps facetiously they say, "If marriage is that tough, it would be better to be single."

⁸⁰"When one further recognizes that remarriage was viewed as a fundamental right by virtually all Jews in antiquity (*m. Git.* 9:3), one should realize that if Jesus had wanted anyone in his audience to understand that he was forbidding all remarriage, he would have had to have said so much more clearly" (C.L. Blomberg, "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage . . ." *TrinJ* 11NS [1990]: 179-180).

⁸¹In the Greek language the present tense verb does indicate continued action if it is used in the imperative, subjunctive, or infinitive moods. But when used in the indicative mood, as it is here, it does not always mean progressive action; and the only way to tell is through the context (C.D. Osburn, "The Present Indicative of Matthew 19:9," *RestQ* 24 [1981]: 193-203).

But instead of softening the blow, Jesus says, “You are right! It would be better to be celibate, but not everyone can be.” Paul would agree (1 Cor 7:7-9). Most people in the modern church just chuckle and say, “Yea, that’s not for me!” without ever giving serious thought to the contribution that a single person could make to the kingdom.⁸² Relationships are beautiful and they are God’s plan. But they take an enormous amount of time and energy that could be used for the work of the gospel (1 Cor 7:32-35).

But remaining single does require a gift from God. There are three categories of eunuchs, according to Jesus. The first is a person who was born without the natural capacity for sex. The second is a person who, through surgery (e.g., castration), loses his sexual urges (e.g., Acts 8:27). Third, is a person who determines not to marry for the cause of Christ. While the theology of celibacy for the Catholic priesthood has appropriately been questioned by Protestants and Catholics alike (cf. 1 Tim 4:1-3), the gift of celibacy has been woefully underestimated by evangelicals.

Most single people among our ranks are treated as an unfortunate anomaly. Great attempts are made to “fix them up” as if they were broken.⁸³ Singles’ ministries would do well to give a balanced Biblical perspective rather than falling prey to the unbalanced contemporary persuasion that idolizes sexuality. There are more important things than personal, sexual gratification. The question should not be, “Which would make me happier,” but “Would I be more effective for Christ married or single?”

§ 123
Jesus on
Children in
the Kingdom
(Mt 19:13-15;
Mk 10:13-16;
Lk 18:15-17)

Matthew and Mark connect this section with Jesus’ teaching on divorce. By doing so, they may intend to highlight the sanctity of the family. Luke, on the other hand, connects it to a couple of parables on prayer — The Widow and the Tax Collector. Both parables show how God hears the prayers of “little people.” The disciples have apparently missed this lesson since they forbid these kids to come to Jesus.

Mk 10:13-16
with Mt 19:13-
15; Lk 18:16

{Then^{MT}} ¹³People were {also^{LK}} bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them {and pray for them,^{MT}} but the disciples rebuked them {those who brought them.^{MT}} ¹⁴When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He {called the children to him and^{LK}} said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God {heaven^{MT}} belongs to such as these. ¹⁵I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the king-



⁸²The early church took this seriously. There were large groups of people who remained single so they could devote their entire time and attention to the service of the church (W.A. Heth, “Unmarried ‘For the Sake of the Kingdom’ (Mt 19:12) in the Early Church,” *GTJ* 8/1 [1987]: 55-88).

⁸³In the Bible we find a number of fruitful single men and women including: Jesus, Jeremiah, Paul, Anna, and probably John the Baptist, Lydia, and Mary Magdalene (cf. F. Stagg, “Biblical Perspectives on the Single Person,” *RevExp* 74 [1977]: 5-19).

dom of God like a little child will never enter it.”⁸⁴ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them {he went on from there.^{MT}}

The crowds continue to expand (cf. Mt 19:2; Mk 10:1), placing increasing demands on Jesus’ time. Among those clamoring for Jesus’ attention and touch are a group of women with their children.⁸⁴

The disciples’ motives are probably good. They want to run interference for Jesus and protect him from these demanding mothers and their rambunctious children. Now, anyone who has been in a church service with a bunch of kids can understand the frustration of the disciples. Kids tend to squirm about and make noise and generally distract everyone around them; sometimes with their sweetness, sometimes with their noise. These children are distracting the adults from hearing Jesus.

Jewish children were expected to be quiet and submissive, and were generally equated with servants until they came of age (cf. Gal 4:1-2). Yet they were a cherished part of Jewish society. It was not at all uncommon for parents to take their children to important people to have them place their hands on them and pray for them. The disciples rebuke them when they should have known better. Clear back in Galilee, Jesus already taught them that children are the epitome of kingdom citizens (cf. § 90, Mt 18:1-5; Mk 9:33-37; Lk 9:46-48).⁸⁵

When Jesus sees what the disciples are doing he becomes angry and tells them to “get out of his way” [*mē kōlyete*.⁸⁶ This doesn’t happen very often. Twice it is implied that Jesus was angry with the Chief Priests when he cleansed the temple (Jn 2:14-17; Mt 21:12-13; Mk 11:15-17; Lk 19:45-46). But only one other time is it explicitly stated that Jesus was angry. That was when he healed the man’s withered hand on the Sabbath (Mk 3:5). He was angry because the Pharisees prioritized religious ritual over this poor man’s need. Thus Jesus got angry with only three groups that we know of: Pharisees, Sadducees, and

⁸⁴ Both Matthew and Mark use the word *paidia*, which was earlier used to describe Jairus’ 12-year-old daughter. But Luke uses the word *brephe* (v. 15) which normally signifies an infant (Lk 2:12, 16; Acts 7:19; 2 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:2) and can even be used for an unborn child (Lk 1:41,44). Thus, Jesus’ invitation includes a broader age-range of children.

⁸⁵ The latter Judean and Porean ministries of Jesus often cover the same issues as Jesus’ Galilean ministry, sometimes even with identical words. Here are some of the parallels: (1) Sending out the 72 (Lk 10:1-16) and the 12 (Mt 10); (2) The Model Prayer (Lk 11:1-4, 9-12 & Mt 6:9-13; 7:7-11); (3) Beelzebub and blasphemy of the H.S. (Lk 11:14-36 & Mt 12:22-37; Mk 3:20-30); (4) Conflict with the Pharisees at a meal (Lk 11:37-54; 14:1-24 & Mt 15:1-20; Mk 7:1-23); (5) Warnings for discipleship (Lk 12:1-12; 14:25-35; 17:1-10 & Mt 10:18-33, 37-38; 18:6-7, 21-22); (6) Warnings about money (Lk 12:22-34 & Mt 6:19-34); (7) Warnings about allegiance to Jesus above family (Lk 12:49-53 & Mt 10:34-36); (8) Warnings about discerning the times (Lk 12:54-59 & Mt 16:2-3; 5:25-36); (9) Controversy over Sabbath healing (Lk 13:10-21; 14:1-24 & Mt 12:1-14; Mk 2:23-3:6; Lk 6:1-11); (10) Extended use of Parables (Lk 15-16; 18:1-14 & Mt 13; Mk 4; Lk 8); (11) Raising someone from the dead (Lk 7:11-17; 8:40-56; Mt 9:18-26; Mk 5:21-43 & Jn 11:17-44).

⁸⁶ This same Greek construction is also used in the context of baptism (Mt 3:14; Acts 8:36; 10:47; 11:17). However, the connection is circumstantial, not theological. In other words, this verse is not intended to teach or even suggest infant baptism.

his disciples. How odd it is then that “sinners” are the target of so much “Christian” venom.⁸⁷

There could scarcely be a more tender scene than this. Jesus calling the kids and scooping them up in his arms. They are models for kingdom citizens, not because they are gullible and weak. They are model citizens because (a) they are humble, (b) they do not seek rank or position, and (c) they freely recognize their need for help.

The scene is brief. Jesus must move on. He has a Passover to attend.

§ 124a
Rich Young Ruler
(Mt 19:16-30;
Mk 10:17-31;
Lk 18:18-30)

This story is simple. An influential young “businessman” is compelled to follow Jesus. But he just can’t bring himself to part with his money so he leaves Jesus instead. Few stories are more poignant for the American church. Perhaps that’s why we feel it necessary to explain it away. We say, “Boy that’s a powerful story for rich people.” We don’t think it applies to us. You see, the “rich” are people with just a little more money than we have. Or we say, “Well, Jesus doesn’t ask everyone to give up wealth, only those for whom it was a problem.” Yet we never consider just how much of an obstacle money is in our own pursuit of Christ.

Mk 10:17-18
with Mt 19:16;
Lk 18:18

¹⁷As Jesus started on his way, a man {a certain ruler^{LK}} ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what {good thing^{MT}} must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁸“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.”

As Jesus weaves his way through Perea toward Jerusalem, he is once again stopped with a question. This urgent young man stands in stark contrast to the children Jesus has just blessed (Mt 19:13-15; Mk 10:13-16; Lk 18:15-17). Even though he is young (probably 20-40), he has already achieved great economic success (Lk 18:23).⁸⁸ Furthermore, he is a respected leader in the community (Lk 18:18), probably through the synagogue. He was respectful (Mk 10:17), religious (Mk 10:20), and teachable (Lk 18:18). He appears to be the perfect “prospect.”

Unlike the Pharisees, who halted Jesus’ progress with a question designed to trap him (Mt 19:3; Mk 10:2), this young man seems to be sincere. After all, he approaches Jesus with utmost respect both in his posture (kneeling), appellation

⁸⁷Jesus’ emotions betray God’s own priorities. Emotions are not human weakness but, in fact, part of our *Imago Dei*. Our weakness comes in our inability to control our emotions or direct them toward the right people and situations (cf. W. Hansen, “The Emotions of Jesus,” *CT* [Feb 3, 1997]: 43-46).

⁸⁸Although Matthew and Mark simply say that he had many possessions [*ktēmata polla*], which does not necessarily mean that he was rich, Luke uses a phrase that could only be applied to the upper class [*plousios sphodra*].

(“Good teacher”), and honesty (“What do I still lack?”). Hence, Jesus “loved” him (Mk 10:21). Furthermore, he asks a good question; no, the *best* question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Before Jesus answers his question, he must clarify two important issues: #1 — Who is Jesus, and #2 — How are we saved? Unless he has a basic understanding of these two things, he won’t properly understand Jesus’ answer to his question.

Issue #1: Who is Jesus? The young man addresses him as “Good Teacher.”⁸⁹ Jesus calls his attention to what that implies. When Jesus says, “No one is good but God alone,” he is not saying that he, himself, is not good. Rather, he is calling attention to the fact that he shares God’s goodness. Only on that basis and only with that understanding will this young man be able to properly hear the answer to his question.

This “goodness” probably has more to do with Jesus’ ability to teach truth than his moral perfection (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15). In other words, he is a good teacher because he has all the right answers. Yet God alone has a corner on the “truth.” Therefore, if Jesus always speaks truth then he truly speaks as God’s representative (Jn 8:28; 12:49-50). Therefore, this young man had better be prepared to listen well.

“If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” “Which ones?” the man inquired. Jesus replied,^{MT})¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother,^a {and love your neighbor as yourself.^{b/MT}

Mk 10:19-20
with Mt 19:17-20

²⁰“Teacher,” he {the young man^{MT}} declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy. {What do I still lack?^{MT}}

^a/Mk 10:19 Exodus 20:12-16; Deut. 5:16-20 ^b/Mt 19:19 Lev. 19:18

Issue #2: How are we saved? The Jews were thoroughly convinced that a person gained God’s favor by their own good behavior (Deut 30:15-16). So Jesus first gives the typical Jewish response, “Keep the commandments.” He catalogues the fifth through the tenth commandments (Exod 20:12-16; Deut 5:16-20).⁹⁰ Then, as Matthew notes, Jesus summarizes the whole list by appending Leviticus 19:18, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (cf. Mt 22:34-40).

⁸⁹ There are significant differences between Matthew’s wording and Mark’s which D.A. Carson has dealt with in length (“Redaction Criticism: On the Legitimacy and Illegitimacy of a Literary Tool,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D.A. Carson and J.D. Woodbridge [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983], 131-137). These differences will not be dealt with here because (1) the purpose of this work is not to deal with the technical aspects of higher criticism, (2) they don’t significantly affect the meaning of the passage, and (3) Matthew hints at Mark’s wording anyway in v. 17, indicating that the two readings are not antithetical. J.W. Wenham, “Why Do You Ask Me About the Good? A Study of the Relation Between Text and Source Criticism,” *NTS* 28 (1982): 116-125, makes a case for Matthew’s original text reading “Good Teacher, what good thing must I do.”

⁹⁰ Mark probably intends for “do not defraud” to be a practical application of the 10th commandment to not covet.

These last six commandments deal only with a person's horizontal relationships (i.e., human to human). This rich, young ruler is blameless in his dealings with other people (v. 20). That does not mean that he is absolutely sinless (Rom 3:23). But a sincere apology and the temple sacrifices made up the shortfall for occasional transgressions. He is impeccably devout and could say with the Apostle Paul, "As for legalistic righteousness, *I am faultless*" (Phil 3:6).

Even though his external righteousness is blameless, his heart and mind are not right. Something is missing, and he knows it. In the depths of his spirit he feels the words of Jesus, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20). So when Jesus gives him the classic Jewish answer to "How are we saved?" he responds, "Yeah, yeah, I've heard all that before, but it just hasn't worked. What am I missing?!" This young man knows that none of his previous good deeds have earned him eternal life.⁹¹ Yet still he clings to legalism for he knows nothing else.

Mk 10:21-22
with Mt 19:21;
Lk 18:22

{When Jesus heard this,^{LK}} ²¹Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "[If you want to be perfect,^{MT}] Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²²At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus calls this young man to be a disciple by first ridding himself of all his money. This was an especially surprising demand in light of the fact that the Jews forbade giving away more than twenty percent of your possessions (*Kethub. 50 a*). Every disciple is called to follow Jesus in faith. But sometimes there are obstacles that stand between us and Jesus so that we cannot follow him until we rid ourselves of these barriers. For this young man, the barrier was money. For others it may be family, business, reputation or self. Just because the obstacle may be different for us, the demand is no less absolute or radical (Gal 2:20; Mt 10:37-39; Phil 3:7-11).

The two stories that closely follow in Luke's account show that not every disciple is called to sell everything and give it to the poor. Zacchaeus gave half of his wealth (19:1-10), and the faithful servants in the parable of 19:11-27 are called to invest their money wisely for the Master (Blomberg, p. 299). In all instances, however, God's view of money is clear: He owns it all. We are merely stewards, using his resources for his purposes. At the same time, the contemporary American church, inundated by a materialistic society, needs to carefully hear Jesus' call to abandon wealth to follow him. We almost certainly underestimate how much of this text actually does apply to us (Jas 2:14-17; 1 Jn 3:17).

⁹¹It is probably significant that this text uses three terms synonymously for salvation talk: Eternal life, entering the kingdom, and saved. At the very least, this indicates that eternal life has a present aspect to it. It lasts forever, but it begins now.

One can keep the law and still love anything else (money, sex, power). But when coming to Jesus, we forsake all other loves. This man must make a choice between a relationship with Jesus and a love for his money. “No man can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Mt 6:24). The primary issue here is not benevolence to the poor, as important as that is, but allegiance to Jesus. His money is standing in his way. Jesus asks him to get rid of it.

The man goes away sad. Luke uses a word that might be rendered literally, “surrounded by grief.” Matthew says he was “grieving” [*lypeō*]. His sadness is not that he just “lost his salvation.” Certainly, in his mind, he did not choose money over eternal life. Rather, he is sad because his question remained unanswered. He is still looking for a way to gain salvation AND keep his money.

He mistakes salvation as some kind of reward for righteousness rather than a personal relationship with his Messiah. If salvation is seen as a system of reward, then there is no reason a person cannot have riches or power and still be saved. But if salvation is understood as a relationship with Jesus, then you must make a choice about what you will give your time and attention to: money or the Lord.

²³Jesus looked around {at him^{LK}} and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God {heaven^{MT}}!”

Mk 10:23-27
with Mt 19:23,25;
Lk 18:24

²⁴[When [they] heard this,^{MT}] The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is^a to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁶The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

^a24 Some manuscripts *is for those who trust in riches*

While Jesus watches this young man walk off with his chin in his chest, he says to the disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.” We have become accustomed to this kind of talk. But Jesus’ Jewish audience is astonished. You see, they believed, with scriptural support, that wealth was a blessing from God. Of all people, the rich were the most likely candidates for eternal life since God favored them. If they can’t make it, then what are the chances for all the “little people”?

The crowd is perplexed. Instead of solving their conundrum, Jesus confuses them further by saying that the rich would no sooner get into heaven than a camel⁹² would pass through the eye of a needle. That is obviously impossible!

⁹²J.D.M. Derrett suggests that “camel” in Aramaic [*gamal*] is a play on the word *gemiluth* meaning “acts of benevolence” which the rich were neglecting (“A Camel through the Eye of a Needle,” NTS 32 [1986]: 465-70).



The camel⁹³ was the largest animal in Palestine and the eye of a needle⁹⁴ was the smallest “opening” in common use.

Some modern guides in Jerusalem will point to a supposed gate in the wall as the “eye of the needle.” It is common to suggest that this gate is what Jesus is referring to here since the camel could just barely squeeze through it and then only on its knees. Aside from the fact that there is no evidence to support such an interpretation, it ruins the metaphor. The point is not that it is difficult for the rich to get into heaven but that it is impossible.⁹⁵

Jesus’ audience is stunned. Their question is predictable, “Who then can be saved?” It may appear that Jesus is off on a tangent, but in fact, he is at the heart of the issue. The rich young ruler asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus points out that no amount of good works will suffice. No amount of law-keeping will “fill the gap” (Mt 19:20). We must abandon all that stands between us and Jesus and trust God alone and completely. Salvation is God’s gracious gift (Mk 10:27), which we appropriate through a response of faith (Mk 10:21).

Mk 10:28

²⁸Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!”

Mt 19:28

²⁸Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Mk 10:29-31
with Lk 18:29

²⁹[N]o one who has left home {or wife^{LK}} or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel {the kingdom of God^{LK}} ³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Peter is sharp! He starts to think to himself, “Salvation is gained through total abandonment of this world and total commitment to following Jesus. I’ve done that!” So, speaking for the Twelve, he points out the obvious to Jesus. Perhaps his motives are a bit selfish and his mindset a bit legalistic, but his logic is sound. Jesus gives him a straightforward, legitimate answer. The Apostles’ reward will be fourfold. All other disciples will share the last three of the four benefits:

First, the Apostles will sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28, cf. Lk 22:28-30). That is, when Jesus returns and judgment begins, the twelve Jewish tribes will be judged by the twelve Apostles. At the same time, Christians will help judge of the rest of the world and even the

⁹³In Babylon this idiom is changed to an elephant passing through the eye of a needle since elephants are the largest animal in Babylon.

⁹⁴Luke uses a special word that Matthew and Mark do not, which indicates a surgical needle.

⁹⁵A few of the later manuscripts substitute “rope” for “camel.” That does justice to the metaphor and retains the element of impossibility, but the manuscript support is so weak that it makes it an unlikely reading.

angels (1 Cor 6:2-3). Jesus calls this the “renewal of all things” [*palingenesia*] (cf. Isa 34:4; 51:6; 65:17; Dan 7:9-14, 18, 27; 2 Pet 3:10-13; Rev 21-22). We will finally get back to God’s original plan that started in the Garden.

The second reward, which takes place in this present life (Mk 10:30), is the multiplication of the very things we are asked to give up (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields). Mark’s list is significant. The “house” includes both persons and possessions. (i.e., land). The persons are listed in ascending order of value: siblings, parents, children. Thus Jesus is calling us to give up those persons and possessions that are most dear to us. Matthew and Mark both specify the reward as one hundred times the amount sacrificed. This is 10,000% interest. This promise is literally fulfilled when the church shares its wealth with the body of Christ.

Third, along with this great wealth comes persecution (Mk 10:30). It is part of the package for standing with Jesus (Jn 15:18-25). Finally, beyond the persecutions of this life is the hope of eternal life. That will certainly make all the sufferings we endure here seem as nothing (Rom 8:18).

It is unfortunate that our Bibles begin a new chapter here. This parable is an extension of the previous discussion. That becomes obvious when we read the same words in both Matthew 19:30 and 20:16, “The last will be first and the first will be last.” This phrase serves as the “book ends” for the parable.

Thus, this parable illustrates how the first can be last and the last first. But contextually it also rounds out Jesus’ answer to Peter about rewards of discipleship. The rich man asked Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Aside from keeping the commandments, Jesus said he would have to give up all his possessions and follow him. The rich young ruler walked away sad, but Peter asked, “Lord, we have done that. So what will we get?” Jesus presents an impressive list. There are benefits to discipleship. But that is not the end of the story. Salvation is by grace through faith. Lest Peter think that he earned these benefits, Jesus tells this story to remind us that what we have in Christ is not because we have earned it but because God is gracious.

¹“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ²He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

Mt 20:1-7



³“About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵So they went.

“He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

⁷“Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’”

§ 124b
Parable: First Shall Be Last and the Last, First
(Mt 20:1-16)



During the harvest, a farmer has to hire extra hands to get all the crops into the barn before they spoil in the field. It is a delightful but frantic time. In Palestine, he went to the marketplace where itinerant workers would congregate, waiting to be hired.

Our story opens where the workday begins, at sunrise in the marketplace. There we meet the farmer who hires a group of men and sends them to his vineyard to gather grapes for the day.⁹⁶ The going wage was one denarius for twelve hours of work.⁹⁷ That's what the farmer promises these hired hands. A few hours into the workday the grapes aren't being gathered fast enough. So the farmer returns to the marketplace to find and hire more workers. Because they are late-comers, he doesn't promise them a denarius but only "what is fair." The farmer continues to hire laborers in this same manner throughout the day: at noon, 3 p.m., and 5 p.m., merely one hour before the workday ends. This is an obvious exaggeration but it paints a vivid picture.

Mt 20:8-16

⁸"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'

⁹"The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹²'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

¹³"But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

¹⁶"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

In those days workers were generally paid at the end of each workday (cf. Lev 19:13). They all line up to get their money. At the front of the line are those hired last. The farmer's foreman begins to dole out the cash. Everyone who has been hired after sunrise has no idea what they are going to be paid, but certainly they expect less than a denarius. What a shock it must be for those who have worked only one hour to receive a full day's pay — twelve times what they worked for!

That excites everybody. They start to figure how much of a bonus they might receive. But when they stretch out their hand, the foreman plops down a single denarius. Those who have labored since sunrise are not just disappointed, they are downright indignant. Like echoes from their childhood, they cry, "It's not fair!" The farmer, with indignation that matches their own replies, "You're

⁹⁶The vineyard was a frequent symbol for Israel (esp. Isa 5:1-7).

⁹⁷The soldier's wage seemed to have set the standard. They were paid a denarius a day (Tobit 5:14; Tacitus, *Annales*, 1.17; Pliny 33:3).

right, it is not fair . . . It is gracious. And that is my business and none of your concern!”⁹⁸

In this same way, “Many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first” (19:30). At present, we only get glimpses of this promise. However, when Jesus returns there will be a reversal of man’s economy. The totem pole of prestige will be flipped upside down so that those who are on top in this world will be on the bottom in God’s kingdom.⁹⁹

Our world honors beauty, wealth and power. These are the people who get to go to the front of the line to receive preferential treatment. But God honors faith, humility, and childlikeness. So when the “kingdom comes,” the most unlikely candidates of this world will be treated with equal or greater respect than the present day “biggies.” The poor will be rich, the oppressed will be liberated, children will be exalted, the handicapped will be healed, and the uneducated will be informed. But right now, right here, it’s our job as Jesus’ church to implement God’s economy as much as we can. Obviously we can’t do it all. But when Jesus returns, he will complete the process.

MK 10:32 They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve {disciples^{MT}} aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³“We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and {everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled:^{LK}} the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴who will mock him {[and] insult him^{LK}} and spit on him, flog him and kill [crucify^{MT}] him. Three days later he will rise.”

³⁴The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

§ 125a
Third
Prediction of
Jesus’ Passion
 (Mt 20:17-19;
 Mk 10:32-34;
 Lk 18:31-34)

Lk 18:34

This is a graphic scene. After three particularly potent encounters with the Pharisees (19:3), his disciples (19:13), and this rich young ruler (19:16), Jesus is back on route to Jerusalem. He seems to be walking with a vengeance toward the capital city, his terminal destination. It appears that Jesus is walking out ahead, leading the pack with a furious pace. His disciples follow close behind, astonished, while the more uncommitted crowds lag further behind, afraid. Just what was going through their minds, we may never know. But this is certain, there is something in Jesus’ pace and resoluteness that shouts just how serious are these moments and movements. For whatever else this holy city represented to these people, for Jesus it meant death.

⁹⁸ The term “friend” [*betaire*] is not a term of endearment (cf. Mt 11:16; 22:12; 26:50). It closely parallels our idiom, “Hey buddy!”

⁹⁹ This little word “many” indicates that this is not an absolute statement. Not *all* roles will be reversed in the kingdom of God.

He takes the Twelve aside to teach them privately once again (cf. 16:21 and 17:22-23). Away from the crowd, he explains to his faithful band what this is all about. This is the third time Jesus clearly predicts his own death (cf. § 83, 86, 88), although he has alluded to it a number of times. This particular prediction goes beyond the other two by stating the specific involvement of the Gentiles and the specific mode of execution — crucifixion.

There are essentially six elements to this prediction:

1. It must take place in *Jerusalem*.
2. He will be *betrayed*.
3. The *chief priests and teachers of the law* (i.e., Pharisaic and Sadducean leaders) will be responsible for his death.
4. He will be delivered over to the *Gentiles* for a death sentence.
5. They will *mock (insult and spit), flog, and crucify* him.
6. He will *rise on the third day*.¹⁰⁰

Many have doubted the integrity of this narrative. Because it is such a specific prediction, they assert that it must have been written after Jesus' death and then credited to Jesus. But if Jesus was who he claimed, and did what the Gospel writers say, then predictive prophecy is a minor miracle for Jesus. The issue boils down to this: Was Jesus a mere man or does his life indicate he was God's envoy?

Luke offers two significant contributions to this narrative. First, he reminds the disciples that the prophets predicted his death (v. 31). Certainly Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 must have come to mind as well as Psalms 16:10; 118:22; Genesis 3:15. Second, he highlights their ignorance, as he did with the second passion prediction (Lk 9:45). This matter was hidden from them. The word [*kryptō*] seems to indicate that God concealed the matter from the Apostles; it wasn't merely that they were obtuse.

§ 125b
James and
John Ask for
Chief Seats
(Mt 20:20-28;
Mk 10:35-45;
cf. Lk 22:24-27)

If they weren't Apostles, we would be tempted to dismiss them as selfish fools when James and John ask for special position with Jesus. They think they are en route to the "inaugural ball" when, in fact, they are on their way to an excruciating execution.

MK 10:35 Then {the mother of^{MT}} James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him {kneeling down.^{MT}} "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

³⁶⁴"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

¹⁰⁰Notice that Mt and Lk, in reference to the three days of the resurrection, use the dative case indicating "on" while Mk uses the preposition "after" [*meta*]. This indicates that Jesus was not speaking of a precise chronological measurement.

³⁷They replied, “Let {grant^{MT}} one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory {kingdom.^{MT}}”



According to Matthew, it was Salome (Mt 27:55-56 with Mk 15:40), the mother of James and John, who makes this request. The two boys may have put her up to it, thinking she will have more pull with Jesus. It is likely that Salome was Jesus' aunt (cf. Jn 19:25), and as a woman she might be able to tug his heartstrings better than they. Besides, the request looks less selfish coming from their mother. But Jesus sees through their scheme and speaks directly to James and John.¹⁰¹

Their request is open-ended: “Do for us whatever we ask.” It appears that they know their request is a bit out of bounds. After all, Jesus has already confronted the whole group about seeking rank and position (§ 90). And he has just reiterated the importance of becoming like children (§ 123), and his own impending death (§ 125a). As usual, they have not been listening. To make matters worse, they are going to continue to argue about which of them is the greatest even up to the very night Jesus is betrayed (Lk 22:24-27).

Jesus isn't going to fall for their ploy. He asks them, “What is it you want?” They reply, “We want the #1 and #2 seats in the kingdom.” They are dangerously close to Jerusalem. This city represents danger for Jesus. But like Superman, Jesus consistently dodges and deflects bullets. Neither plots of the Jews, storms of the sea, nor demonic forces have overpowered him. Undoubtedly the Twelve share the expectation of the crowds that Jesus will establish his kingdom upon arriving in Jerusalem. Therefore, James and John want to beat the others to the punch. They want to seize the highest administrative appointments in the coming Messianic kingdom. And why shouldn't they? They have the majority vote in the inner three!

³⁸“You don't know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

MK 10:38-40
with Mt 20:23

³⁹“We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,⁴⁰but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared {by my Father.^{MT}}”

Jesus tries to open their eyes by using two metaphors for suffering: Baptism (Mt 3:11-12) and Cup (Ps 75:8; Isa 51:17; Jer 25:15-28). They aren't headed to Jerusalem for a victory celebration but for suffering. James and John want to be singled out as Jesus' closest associates. Presently that won't mean promotion but persecution. They are ignorantly confident that they can share Jesus' impending experiences.

¹⁰¹ Mt 20:22 uses the second person plural “you all,” indicating that Jesus was speaking directly to James and John or at least including them in his answer to Salome.

Indeed, both of them will be baptized with the fire of persecution. James will be the first Apostolic martyr (Acts 12:2). John, on the other hand, will be the last surviving Apostle. According to tradition he was the only one who did not die as a martyr. Although his life was spared, he was not exempt from suffering. In the waning years of his life, he was exiled to Patmos where he saw the vision of Revelation (1:1).

Jesus can promise them persecution but not position. That is his Father's prerogative alone. Although Jesus will be given all authority after his resurrection (Mt 28:18), during his ministry, he lives in submission to his Father (Jn 14:28). Not only that, he submits himself to the physical and spiritual needs of sinful humanity. He comes as a servant and invites his disciples to no greater position.

Mk 10:41-45 with
Mt 20:28; Lk 22:26

⁴¹When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴²Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant {as the youngest, ^{LK¹}} ⁴⁴and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even {just as^{MT}}

the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The ten are predictably upset, not because James and John misconstrue Jesus' teaching but because they beat them to the punch. All twelve want those coveted chief seats. Even after three years of walking with Jesus, watching him serve and taking notes on his sermons, they still don't grasp the basic purpose and method of his ministry — to die as a servant of humanity. You would think Jesus' closest disciples would know better. But even after 2,000 years, the lesson is hardly better understood or implemented.

The problem is simply this: We are imitating the ways of the world (Gentiles), rather than Jesus. We pattern our churches after governments and businesses. We vie for power and position through titles, salaries, recognition, votes, perks, boards and authority. Jesus' heart is broken.

The pathway to greatness in the kingdom is not up some corporate ladder. Rather, it is paved with a basin and a towel (Jn 13:1-17). This is not difficult to understand. Jesus repeats it too much for us to forget it. But our obvious neglect to live it out reveals the difficulty we have with this sublime paradox that the greatest in the kingdom of God is to be a servant (1 Cor 9:19; 2 Cor 4:5; 1 Pet 5:2-3).

Jesus' ultimate example of the theology of humility is around the next corner, at the cross. Liberal theologians have attempted to whisk away Mark 10:45 (and Mt 20:28). It is too clear to be comfortable. But it tenaciously stands its ground. This is Jesus' mission statement: To serve humanity by dying for our sins. The word "ransom" [*lytron*] was commonly used in Greek circles for the price that was paid for the release of a slave or prisoners,¹⁰² and sometimes for

¹⁰²A.Y. Collins, "The Significance of Mark 10:45 among Gentile Christians," *HTR* 90/4 (1997): 371-382.

those released from demon possession or cultic curses. Furthermore, in the LXX it is used for “deliverance” of God’s people (Exod 30:12; Ps 49:7-9). Here, the Greek and Hebrew worlds come together as Jesus is pictured releasing captives from their slavery to sin (Rom 6:16-18; Isa 53:10-12).

We also find in Mark 10:45 the preposition “for” [*anti*] which means “in place of.” It could hardly be clearer that Jesus died “instead of many” (Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 1:18). His death is a replacement, a substitute for ours.

The healing of blind Bartimaeus seems symbolic. On the one hand, it looks back over the last three years and exemplifies Jesus’ messianic ministry (Lk 4:18). On the other hand, it looks forward to Jerusalem’s blindness (cf. Jn 9:39-41). It points out the paradox. The blind beggar sees, but Israel’s leaders are blind.

§ 126
Healing Blind
Bartimaeus
at Jericho
 (Mt 20:29-34;
 Mk 10:46-52;
 Lk 18:35-43)



⁴⁶Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving {approached^{LK}} the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), {two blind men were^{MT}} was sitting by the roadside begging.

Mk 10:46 with
 Lk 18:35;
 Mt 20:30

³⁶When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. ³⁷They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”

Lk 18:36-39

³⁸He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

³⁹Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

The city of Jericho is located about fifteen miles northeast of Jerusalem. It is one of the major stops on the trade route to Arabia. It would be the last stop for the pilgrims from Syria, Galilee, Decapolis, Mesopotamia, and Arabia as they traveled to Jerusalem for this Passover feast. It was a fertile city full of palms, figs, gardens, and balsams used to heal diseases of the eyes (Strabo 16.2.41), (Carson, p. 435).

As Jesus leads the pilgrim parade out of the city, he encounters two blind men.¹⁰³ Mark and Luke only mention one man, Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46). He’s the one who apparently shouts out to Jesus. But Matthew informs us that there were

¹⁰³ Matthew and Mark say Jesus healed the men as he left Jericho. Luke says he healed them as he entered. This apparent discrepancy is easily solved. There were actually two sites of Jericho at this time (Josephus, *War* 4.459). They were only about a mile apart. So Jesus healed these fellows as he left the old city but before he came to the new city. Matthew and Mark mention the OT site which was pretty much in ruins, while Luke, more Greek in orientation, mentions the newer site which had been beautifully rebuilt by Herod the Great.

Another possible solution is that Luke placed the stories of Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus topically rather than chronologically making Jesus’ Jericho visit climax with Zacchaeus’ story. Then, to avoid unnecessary confusion, he has Jesus heal the men on the way into the city instead of on his way out. In any event, Mk 10:46 does mention both Jesus entering and leaving the city. Luke follows the first half of the verse while Matthew only mentions the second half.

actually two men healed that day. He did the same thing with the two Gerasene demoniacs (Mt 9). That's just typical of Matthew's eyewitness detail.

Bartimaeus and his friend sit by the roadside begging. That's about the only way a blind man could make a living in those days. Now, they are blind but not deaf. They hear the tumult as the parade passes. It is a motley crowd, made up of pilgrims heading to Jerusalem, traders and caravaners passing through this commercial capital, Roman soldiers stationed here to keep peace in this strategic city, and merchants trying to take advantage of the excitement inherent in Passover.

Bartimaeus asks someone what is going on. They tell him that Jesus is passing through their town. This is headline news! Surely the gossip has not slipped by Bartimaeus' acute ears. Rumor has it that this Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead over in Bethany, not much more than a dozen miles away. Further rumors say that the Sanhedrin is after this guy for blasphemy and insubordination. Bartimaeus cares little about the rumors. All he knows is that anyone who can raise the dead is able to give him sight! That is enough for him.

He begins to shout, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" That's the same phrase the blind man of Galilee used to secure his healing over a year ago (Mt 9:27-31). Because this phrase is used in both accounts and because both involve two blind men, some have suggested that they are actually two versions of the same healing. That is unlikely for several reasons: (1) Matthew was an eyewitness to both accounts and would not likely confuse them. (2) They take place in two different geographical areas, separated by more than a year. (3) The first account ends with a command to keep quiet (Mt 9:30). Bartimaeus may use this same phrase because he heard about the other healing. Or it may just be that both these blind men are more astute in identifying Jesus than is the general populace. Nonetheless, there could hardly be a more kosher Messianic title than this one (Isa 11:1, 10; Jer 23:5-6; Ezek 34:23-24; see notes on § 68).¹⁰⁴

The front-runners of the crowd are less than impressed with Bartimaeus' outburst. They try to shut him up just like the disciples had with the little children (§ 123). But the more they tried to quiet him, the more of a scene he creates until finally he captures Jesus' attention.

Mk 10:49-52 with
Lk 18:41; Mt 20:34

⁴⁹Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." ⁵⁰Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, "Rabbi, {Lord,^{LK}} I want to see." {Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes.^{MT}}

¹⁰⁴The title, "Son of David" is used primarily in the context of healing (Mt 9:27-31; 12:22-23; 15:21-28; 20:29-34; 21:14-15). Kingsbury suggests that the title is a polemic against Jewish rejection of their Messiah and king. That is, the blind outcasts "saw" their true king, while the religious leaders were blind to him (cf. Jn 9:40-41) ("The Title 'Son of David' in Matthew's Gospel," *JBL* 95/4 [1976]: 591-602).

⁵²"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you."

⁴³Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God. Lk 18:43

Jesus stops the procession and calls for Bartimaeus. Suddenly, the people who excoriated him start to encourage him. The NIV's "cheer up" is rather anemic. Every other use of this word [*tharseō*] is by Jesus when he promises someone healing or safety (Mt 9:2, 22; 14:27; Mk 6:50; Jn 16:33; Acts 23:11). There is no doubt, this guy is going to get his sight back. We see that Bartimaeus has full confidence, for he throws off his cloak and runs to Jesus. In other words, he left his most valuable possession on the curb. For a blind beggar that is a dangerous proposition. But he seems certain that he will be able to retrieve it.

Jesus knows what Bartimaeus wants but asks anyway. Apparently Jesus wants to elicit faith from him and a proper response from the crowd. Typical of Matthew, he tells us that Jesus is not content simply to heal Bartimaeus, but that he feels compassion for him and touches his eyes (cf. Mt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; Mk 1:41). Then Jesus releases him to go his own way. Bartimaeus chooses to join the procession going up toward Jerusalem. Perhaps this will be his very first Passover. What a shock it will be for Bartimaeus to witness with his very own eyes the execution of the one who gave him this newfound sight.

Luke alone tells us about Zacchaeus. For him, this incident is a microcosm of Jesus' ministry.¹⁰⁵ In the last four chapters Luke has stressed the least and the lost. He kept talking about down-and-outers. Now he highlights this "up-and-outer." Like the other outcasts, Jesus welcomes him with open arms. How fitting that Luke concludes this episode with what might be considered a theme for the whole book: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

**§ 127a
Salvation of
Zacchaeus
(Lk 19:1-10)**

¹Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there Lk 19:1-6 by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

News somehow reached Jericho that Jesus was coming. No doubt, the healing of two blind beggars on the outskirts of the old city fanned into flame their

¹⁰⁵J. O'Hanlon, "The Story of Zacchaeus and the Lukan Ethic," *JSNT* 12 (1981): 2-26, shows how this story summarizes Luke's theology in general but especially chapter 18, Jesus' travel narrative, and explicates the sermon on the plain.

interest in Jesus. The crowds migrating to Jerusalem postponed the final leg of their journey. They lined the streets of Jericho awaiting his arrival, hoping to be where the action was. There were various “un-Jewish” elements in the crowd: The Roman peace-keeping forces, the international merchants passing through Jericho, and this small but very powerful chief tax collector.

Zacchaeus was no mere tax collector. He was a chief tax collector in upper management, the most powerful governmental authority of Jericho in the “Revenue Department.” He was in charge of a number of men whom he assigned to various duties and customs in the surrounding area (see notes on § 47a for details on tax collection). Furthermore, Jericho was a major trade center on the route between Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, and Syria. In other words, Zacchaeus is a major player in the Roman government.

He is as eager as the crowds to see this Jesus. But he is too short to see over the shoulders of this clamoring crowd. He can’t squeeze his way to the front to get a good look at him, and because he is hated, both as a tax collector and a Roman collaborator, no one is inclined to give him preferential treatment. His only recourse is to run up the street to the next tall tree and climb it. It happens to be a sycamore-fig tree (an odd breed with the leaves of a sycamore but the fruit of a fig). This is a bit beneath the dignity of a man of his stature. But he doesn’t have many options and his curiosity gets the best of him. It drives him up a tree.

When Jesus reaches the spot, he calls Zacchaeus by name. Perhaps Jesus is familiar with some of the governmental officials of the area. But more likely this is a case of Jesus’ divine knowledge. Some of the crowd must be thinking, “Jesus, you don’t know who you’re talking to!” But the fact that he uses Zacchaeus’ name indicates that Jesus knows exactly who he is talking to. Not only does Jesus know him, he wants and needs him (“I *must* stay . . .” [*dei meinei*]). So Zacchaeus responds immediately and eagerly. We are often bewildered and offended at the people God chooses to love and their immediate and affectionate response to him.¹⁰⁶

Lk 19:7-10

⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’”

⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

⁹Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

How many in the crowd want Jesus to acknowledge them, even with a simple wave or a wink?! How many would pay for a handshake or an auto-

¹⁰⁶ This passage provides a beautiful allegory for our own conversion: Jesus (1) knows you, (2) wants/calls you, and (3) needs you.

graph? Suddenly one individual's dream is coming true. Jesus has stopped to single out one man . . . Zacchaeus! But of all the people who *don't* deserve such an honor, he is at the top of the list. This is a frightful error!

The crowds stand outside Zacchaeus' house in a stupor. This jealous, grumbling mob is fit to be tied. Meanwhile inside, Zacchaeus experiences repentance in a tangible way. His conversion could be chronicled in his checkbook.¹⁰⁷

First, he follows the Law of Moses by repaying four times the amount to all those he has defrauded (Exod 22:1; cf. Lk 3:13). Then he follows the Law of Christ ("the law of love," Gal 6:2; Jas 2:8) by giving half his wealth to care for the poor. Jesus proclaims that he is saved, not on the basis of his good deeds, but on the basis of his relationship to Abraham (Gal 3:29). His good deeds are only an expression and evidence of his faith (Jas 2:14-26). Zacchaeus stands in stark contrast to the rich young ruler (Lk 18:18-30; cf. Lk 12:33).

Jesus concludes with his own mission statement (v. 10). He wants the lost to be found (Lk 15). He wants to heal the sick and release the captives. Whether they are "down-and-outers" like the lepers or "up-and-outers" like Zacchaeus, Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He is less than impressed with our narcissistic religious programming and sanitized sanctuaries that fail to reach the lost.

This parable is very much like the one Jesus will tell about five days from now, on Tuesday of the final week as he privately teaches the Twelve on the Mt. of Olives (Mt 25:14-30). Although there are several differences between the parables, the similarities are stronger.¹⁰⁸ Both parables describe how Jesus' disciples should act between his ascension and his Second Coming.

¹⁰⁷While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the

§ 127b
Parable of the Minas
(Lk 19:11-28;
cf. Mt 25:14-30)



Lk 19:11-15

¹⁰⁷However, A.C. Mitchell, "Zacchaeus Revisited: Luke 19:8 as a Defense" *Biblica* 71 (1990): 153-176, argues that Zacchaeus is not a repentant sinner, but that Jesus vindicates him as a legitimate son of Abraham before his peers. Furthermore, Luke 19:8 describes Zacchaeus' regular practice of benevolence and is not an act of repentance. Thus, Zacchaeus is defending himself as a faithful Jew rather than making a turnaround in his life. If he is right, then the "lost" Jesus came to seek and save, refers to, or at least includes, social outcasts. Thus, this story is not about conversion but Jesus exploding typical stereotypes and subverting our prejudices about "bad" people. See also, A.C. Mitchell, "The Use of *Sukophantein* in Luke 19:8: Further Evidence for Zacchaeus's Defense" *Biblica* 72 (1991): 546-547; R.C. White, "A Good Word for Zacchaeus," *LexTQ* 14 (1979): 89-96; and D.A. Ravens, "Zacchaeus: The Final Part of a Lucan Triptych?" *JSNT* 41 (1991) 19-32. However, D. Hamm argues cogently for the traditional view that Zacchaeus is a repentant sinner ("Luke 19:8 Once Again: Does Zacchaeus Defend or Resolve?" *JBL* 107/3 [1988]: 431-437).

¹⁰⁸Differences: (1) King vs. rich man; (2) amount of money and reward; (3) and hatred for the king. Similarities: (a) The bad servant hides the money rather than deposits it; (b) the king said, "Well done good servant" and "He who has will be given more . . ."; (c) the extra money is given to the servant who earned the most; and (d) both parables end in judgment.



kingdom of God was going to appear at once. ¹²He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. ¹³So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas.^a ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’

¹⁴“But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’

¹⁵“He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.”

^a *13*A mina was about three months’ wages.

The closer Jesus gets to the capital city, the more intense is the popular anticipation that he will inaugurate his Messianic Kingship. Even Jesus’ closest disciples share this misguided notion of a physical, militaristic kingdom (Mt 24:1-3; Acts 1:6). So to correct this erroneous expectation, Jesus tells the parable of the minas.

The plot is simple enough: A rich man makes an attempt to become king through diplomatic measures with a distant government. While he is gone he places several of his stewards over his financial affairs and expects them to make money for him while he is away. But he is a hated man and so the local council sends a diplomatic delegation to this distant government to appeal that he *not* be made king.

When Jesus tells this parable his audience surely snickers. You see, this very thing took place about twenty-five years earlier. Archelaus succeeded his father, Herod the Great. He became Tetrarch over Judea, Samaria and Idumea. But that wasn’t enough for him. So he left his palace in Jericho and traveled to Rome to request the title of King (A.D. 6). The Jews hated him and sent a delegation to plead with Caesar that Archelaus not be made king over them. Archelaus was thus deposed — the Jews won their case. Thus, this crowd would have been shocked to hear that the nobleman in the parable returned as king — the locals lost!

But there is a second historic parallel here — Jesus himself. Many of this very crowd, not much more than a week from now, will shout “Crucify him!” The “nobleman” was rejected by his people who refused to accept him as king. Their petty protest will last only as long as the king is away. When he returns, there will be a reckoning of both the citizens (v. 27), and his own servants (v. 15).

Lk 19:16-23

¹⁶^aThe first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’

¹⁷“Well done, my good servant!” his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’

¹⁸“The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’

¹⁹“His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’

²⁰“Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. ²¹I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’

²²“His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping

what I did not sow? ²³Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?"'

Ten servants are each given a mina (worth about three months wages). It is a small amount to the nobleman, but enough to test the ability of his servants. One of the ten earns ten minas, an incredible increase of 1000%. Another servant also does extremely well with a 500% increase. Both are commended and rewarded with leadership of an entire city for each mina they earned. They have proved themselves worthy in little so they are given much (Lk 16:10).

A third servant, however, doesn't fare so well. In fact, he doesn't even try. He hides the thing! His excuse is fear. Instead of accepting responsibility for his own failure he begins to blame the king for being a "hard man," taking what was not his, living off the labor of others. But his excuse just won't stand up to scrutiny. If the man is truly afraid of his master, and if the master is as mean as the servant accuses him of being, then the servant is an extraordinary fool for not at least depositing the money for interest. A more likely explanation is that the man hates his master and was sure that he would NOT return as king. Then he could keep the mina for himself after all the nobleman's property had been redistributed.

²⁴"Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.'

Lk 19:24-28

²⁵"Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!'

²⁶He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. ²⁷But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.'"

²⁸After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

Now that the nobleman is a king he is going to start acting like one. First he redistributes the wealth wisely. His servants protest that the wealthiest steward gets the extra mina. That may not be fair, but it is a wise business investment. Who wants to invest their money "fairly" rather than "wisely"? Now, if we place our cash in CD's with the highest interest, why should God not grant his resources and rewards to those who execute "kingdom business" most faithfully (1 Pet 4:10; cf. comments on Lk 16:10, § 117a)? If this parable is about the Second Coming of Christ, one might assume that there are levels of reward in heaven.

Second, this king must squelch any potential rebellions. This may be ugly, but in the long run the king will save lives by killing the leaders of this insurrection. In like manner, when Jesus comes there will be judgment and punishment both for those who claim to be his stewards and for those who openly oppose him. Now it would be a mistake to press every gruesome detail of the king in this parable to make it match Jesus. But it would also be a mistake to paint Jesus as eternally turning the other cheek. Jesus is kind and merciful and forgiving. But these traits are balanced with his justice, sternness, and purity. He is not to

be tested or trifled with (cf. Mt 24:27-30; Rev 1:13-18; 19:11-18). As Psalm 2:9-12 says:

You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery. Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

§ 128a & 141

Arrival and Anointing at Bethany

(Mt 26:6-13;

Mk 14:3-9;

Jn 11:55-12:11)

JN 11:55 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. 56 They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple area they asked one another, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the Feast at all?” 57 But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.

Truly, Jesus was born to die. The culmination of his life is imminent and all the major players have moved into place. While many people have joined Jesus on his final trek to Jerusalem, many more have preceded him to the holy city. They have arrived early for ritual purification in preparation for Passover.

The temple mount is beginning to buzz with excitement as the priests gear up for the most sacred festival of their year. But the excitement generated this year is more intense than ever. In addition to the normal Passover preparations there are constant questions about Jesus. On the one hand the crowds keep asking each other, “Do you think Jesus will show up?” After all, he skipped the last Passover but then attended both the Feasts of Tabernacles and Dedication the previous fall and winter (respectively). On the other hand, the religious hierarchy has put out an A.P.B. for his arrest. They blatantly deny that Jesus is anything but a blasphemer and a rabble-rouser in spite of his many wondrous miracles. Their biggest problem is this raising of Lazarus thing. That is a miracle they just can’t deny or evade. Therefore they plan to “undo” it by killing both Jesus and Lazarus. But the populace, if not moved to faith, are at least intensely curious about this rumor of a “raising” and are eager to see both Jesus and Lazarus.

Jn 12:1-2 with
Mt 26:6; Mk 14:3

1Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, {in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper^{MT, MK}}, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

Even if this banquet is held on Saturday, Jesus almost certainly arrives in Bethany on Friday since it is doubtful that he traveled any great distance on the

Sabbath. Although the “Sabbath Journey” of three-fifths of a mile was set by Oral Tradition, Jesus still honors the Scripture through Sabbath rest. Therefore we reckon the six days of John 12:1 by Roman “exclusive” counting and assume Jesus & Co. arrive in Bethany on Friday. That does not necessitate, however, that the banquet is held on the day of his arrival. It could be held on Friday, with all the preparations being completed before the Sabbath began. Or it could be held on Saturday after the Sabbath ended at sunset.

Aside from this banquet, we also read of the Jews from Jerusalem who discover Jesus’ whereabouts and come to see both him and Lazarus (Jn 12:9). When does this take place? Well, we know that the Triumphal Entry, which almost certainly took place on a Sunday, is the next day (Jn 12:12). Therefore we can reconstruct the events this way: Jesus arrives in Bethany on Friday. When Jesus is welcomed into the private home of Simon the Leper, the crowds have no reason to stay in Bethany. They continue their trek to the city of Jerusalem, just two miles over the Mt. of Olives. News of Jesus’ whereabouts arrives too late for the Jerusalemites to make it back to Bethany before the Sabbath begins so they wait until Saturday night to go. Then on Sunday they join Jesus’ entourage at the Triumphal Entry. Meanwhile, this banquet takes place either on Friday or Saturday night.¹⁰⁹

Apparently at least two families join together to honor Jesus: Lazarus’ and Simon’s. It is theoretically possible that “Simon” is another name for Lazarus. But that is unlikely if our assumption is correct that Lazarus is a prominent man among the Jews of Jerusalem (Jn 11:45-47). Even if he were healed, it is doubtful that a leper could gain such status. There is also speculation that he is Martha’s husband, or perhaps her father, since she serves at the banquet. However, it would not be at all uncommon for a woman to serve a meal in a home that was not her own. What seems more likely is that Lazarus and Simon, both of whom have been healed by Jesus, join together in honoring him with a special meal.

³Then Mary took {an alabaster jar of^{MK}} about a pint^a of pure nard, an expensive perfume[.] {She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head^{MK}} {as he was reclining at the table.^{MT}} [S]he poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Jn 12:3 with
Mk 14:3; Mt 26:7

^a3 Greek *a litra* (probably about 0.5 liter)

We must remember that this is not the first time this family has fixed a meal for Jesus and his band (cf. Lk 10:38-42, § 104). Mary honored Jesus the first

¹⁰⁹ Both Matthew (26:2) and Mark (14:1) mention this event along with the Sanhedrin’s plot to capture Jesus and Iscariot’s premeditated betrayal, which took place two days before the Passover (i.e., Wednesday according to Jewish reckoning). Matthew and Mark are not saying that the anointing took place on Wednesday. Rather, they have structured their narrative rhetorically and “flash back” to this event in Bethany earlier in the week which illustrates so well the disciples’ ignorance.

time by sitting at his feet and listening like a good student. This time she will honor him with an expensive and impetuous gift. This alabaster flask likely hung around her neck. It was made of a translucent stone which had been reamed out for its costly contents and then sealed back up. In order to pour out the ointment one would break the neck of the flask.

Inside was a full pint of pure nard, literally “myrrh.” Hendriksen (p. 175) says that this particular ointment was “an aromatic herb grown in the high pasture-land of the Himalayas, between Tibet and India.” It represented a year’s wages, about three hundred denarii. Perfumes were especially important in a culture where water (hence baths) was scarce. But a whole pint of perfume is a bit excessive. She has so much, in fact, that she starts at his head (Mt and Mk) and pours clear down to his feet (Jn). No one needed a whole pint of perfume! Unless, of course, they were dead. It was common to anoint dead bodies heavily and then put other spices and perfumes in the folds of the burial cloth to overpower the stench of decomposition. This lavish act is only reasonable in light of Jesus’ impending death.

Her lavish worship of Jesus is improper according to human standards. It is wasteful. It could have been used for more practical purposes. Furthermore, she lets down her hair in public, a cultural improbity in and of itself, and then proceeds to humiliate herself by wiping Jesus’ feet with her hair!¹¹⁰ Hence, the disciples protest.

Jn 12:4-6 with
Mt 26:8; Mk 14:4-5

⁴But one of his disciples {the disciples,^{MT}} Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected {some of those present were saying indignantly to one another,^{MK}} ⁵“Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.^a” {And they rebuked her harshly.^{MK}} ⁶He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

^a*3*Greek *three hundred denarii*

Mk 14:6-9
with Jn 12:7

⁶“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. {It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.^{JN}} ⁷The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

The disciples, led by Iscariot, begin to object to Mary’s act and berate her for it. Judas is motivated by greed. Since he has pilfered from the money bag, he sees here a wasted opportunity. The others, however, have pure motives, mis-

¹¹⁰ Many have suggested that this scene and Lk 7:36-50 actually stem from the same story but that both have been embellished in different ways. However, the differences in the stories are just too strong to view them as a single tradition. See § 59 for an explanation of the differences between these two narratives.

guided as they were. They think they represent Jesus' heart in this matter since he has so often shown interest in the poor. But Jesus once again adds a surprising twist to the story. Just as Jesus had berated Martha's seemingly reasonable critique of Mary's behavior (Lk 10:40-42), so he also berates the disciples' here.

The disciples just don't understand how beautiful this deed is. But they should. Jesus has now clearly predicted his death at least a half-a-dozen times with another six to eight allusions to it. They apparently just haven't been listening. But Mary has. Her deed looks like a burial anointing. Jesus says it is a burial anointing. Therefore one might assume that she means it to be a burial anointing. Perhaps she and Judas are the first two disciples to truly believe that Jesus is going to die; but how different are their responses. Maybe she isn't quite that perceptive, but if anyone has had a chance to be it is Mary. Of all the disciples, she has listened most carefully to Jesus. And for her perception and devotion, Jesus promises that she will be remembered whenever and wherever the gospel is preached.

Now about the poor, Jesus reminds the disciples that the poor people will always be around. The opportunities to minister to Jesus, however, are numbered. Therefore, this lavish and extravagant gift is not a waste.

The opportunities to minister to the poor are endless. The opportunity to minister to Jesus is limited. What about today? There is nothing wrong with nice church buildings and paying preachers adequately. But these can hardly be equated with gifts lavished on Jesus personally. Now that he is gone it is time for us to redouble our efforts to minister to the poor. This is especially true since Jesus takes it personally when we help the poor (Mt 25:40; cf. Deut 15:11).

⁹Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

Jn 12:9-11

It has been about two months since Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. The very presence of this man with Jesus is the cause of a mass "conversion" among the Jews. These aren't fairy tales that take place in a distant land. Bethany is in their own backyard and now they have been able to verify this incredible story firsthand. But the chief priests still are not impressed. They are not concerned with the veracity of this miracle story. They are concerned about the security of their positions and the breadth of their influence. Since both Jesus and Lazarus are hindrances to these things, they must be eliminated. The blindness and hypocrisy of these Jewish leaders are colossal. But, unfortunately, they are not unparalleled in other religious institutions where hierarchy and power overshadow the purpose and plans of God.

PART TEN

The Final Week

§ 128b
The Triumphal Entry
(Mt 21:1-11, 14-17;
Mk 11:1-11;
Lk 19:29-44;
Jn 12:12-19)



This is only the second event of the life of Jesus to be recorded in all four Gospels. The first was the feeding of the 5,000. The disciples know something significant is about to happen. Jesus walked wherever he went. Yet now, less than two miles from his final destination, he mounts a donkey?! Suddenly this Palestinian peasant looks like a conquering king as he rides into the holy city.¹ The crowds are eager . . . but for what?

1. Preparation

Mk 11:1-7 with
Mt 21:2;
Lk 19:33-34

¹As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ²saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a {donkey with her^{MT}} colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it {them^{MT}} here. ³If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

⁴They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵some people {its owners^{LK}} standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” ⁶They answered as Jesus had told them to {[saying] the Lord needs it,^{LK}} and the people let them go. ⁷When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it.

Jesus approaches Jerusalem from Bethany, about two miles to the east. In between the two cities stands the Mt. of Olives at 2,600'. It provides an impressive, panoramic view, especially of the temple courts which lay 300' directly below. In the next few days, Jesus will make a lot of memories on this mountain. Here he will weep over Jerusalem, give the “Olivet Discourse,” pray in Gethsemane, and ascend to heaven.

¹Cf. Zech 14 and P.B. Duff, “The March of the Divine Warrior and the Advent of the Greco-Roman King: Mark’s Account of Jesus’ Entry into Jerusalem,” *JBL* 111/1 (1992): 55-71.

²According to J.D.M. Derrett, “Law in the New Testament: The Palm Sunday Colt,” *NoyT* 13 (1971): 241-258, the state could sequester animals from the general public for its own use. 1 Sam 8:17 gives OT support for this practice. Jesus, as David’s descendant and Messiah, certainly had this right! Furthermore, rabbis also had this right under certain circumstances. However, unlike the state,

On the eastern slope of the Mt. of Olives is a small village called Bethphage. From there Jesus sends two unnamed disciples (likely Peter and John) to fetch a donkey and her colt.² Matthew mentions that they actually bring two animals.³ Mark explains why. The colt has never been ridden.⁴ If Jesus is going to keep from getting thrown off, they had better bring the colt's mother along to calm its nerves, especially in the midst of this raucous crowd.

Jesus had prepared them for the inevitable — someone was bound to ask why they were taking the animals. They are to say, “The Lord has need of it.” The word “lord” might refer to the owner of the animal, who perhaps had come out to follow Jesus.⁵ However, since Luke says “its owners” were standing there and asked the two disciples what they were doing, it is more likely that the word “Lord” refers to Jesus. We must remember that Jesus has spent the last six months in the area of Judea and Perea. He has raised Lazarus from the dead and his seventy commissioned preachers have healed hundreds or perhaps thousands of people in the area. In other words, Jesus was well-known and well-liked. It is therefore, reasonable to assume that Jesus sends the two disciples to one of his local supporters to appropriate the animals on loan.⁶

2. Prophecy

⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵“Say to the Daughter of Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”^a

Mt 21:4-5



^a5 Zech. 9:9

The book of Zechariah predicts the Messiah with astounding clarity.⁷ This passage in particular was interpreted by many rabbis as Messianic. Matthew shows how this triumphal entry fulfills Zechariah 9:9.⁸ He also shows, however,

Jesus seeks permission to use the animal and promises to return it. Thus the Apostles seem to submit to the legal responsibilities of borrowing an animal from Exod 22:14-15.

³Matthew has been accused of misreading the Hebrew parallelism of Zechariah 9:9 (cited in Mt 21:5), which mentions two animals in subsequent lines, where probably only one is signified by parallel phrases. However, Matthew, of all people, knew how to read prophetic poetry. His account is not a result of faulty hermeneutics, but accurate eyewitness detail.

⁴Oxen, donkeys, and colts that had never been ridden were sometimes used for sacred purposes (Num 19:2; Deut 21:3; 1 Sam 6:7).

⁵J.M. Ross, “Names of God: A Comment on Mk 13:3 and Parallels,” *BT* 35/4 (1984): 443.

⁶J. Blenkinsopp suggests that the act of untying the colt would have Messianic significance based on the Oracle of Judah (Gen 49:10-11), (“The Oracle of Judah and the Messianic Entry,” *JBL* 80 [1961]: 55-64).

⁷Especially Zech 9:9; 11:13; 12:10; 13:7; 14:4.

⁸The introductory phrase is actually closer to Isa 62:11, “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you.’” Since the context of Isa 62:11 is also appropriate to our passages, Matthew may intend for us to see a connection.

that although Jesus is the Messiah predicted by the prophets, he is not the Messiah expected by the people. They were looking for the king to ride into Jerusalem⁹ on a war horse (cf. Rev 6:4; 19:11). What they were promised was a Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6) riding on a donkey — a symbol of kings and of peace (Judg 5:10; 1 Kgs 1:33).

This kind of use of prophecy will continue to the end of the Gospels. Although we have already become accustomed to Jesus fulfilling prophecy throughout the Gospels, we will be overwhelmed by *how much* Jesus fulfills in this last week. Most of it will convey this same message: Jesus is the Messiah predicted by the prophets, but not the Messiah expected by the people.

3. Praise

Mt 21:8 with
Lk 19:36;
Jn 12:13; Mk 11:8

^{36}As he went along,^{LK} ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut {palm^{JN}} branches from the trees {in the fields^{MK}} and spread them on the road.

Lk 19:37

³⁷When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.

Mt 21:9 with
Lk 19:38; Mk 11:10

⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna^a to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he {the king^{LK}} who comes in the name of the Lord!”^b

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”^{MK}

“Peace in heaven and glory^{LK} Hosanna^a in the highest!”

^a A Hebrew expression meaning “Save!” which became an exclamation of praise; also in verse 15

^b Psalm 118:26

As Jesus climbs the Mt. of Olives, the people are prepared to proclaim him Messiah and King. This is the second time such a thing has happened. A year ago, when Jesus fed the 5,000 (men), a crowd was prepared to make him king by force (Jn 6:15). That was up in Galilee. This is on the doorstep of the temple.

It was no accident this crowd is assembled. The Passover pilgrims poured into Jerusalem over this very hill. They had come filled with political and religious fervor. That's especially true this year. Jesus has spent the last six months in an itinerant ministry in Judea and Perea. His entourage of disciples has grown steadily. Furthermore, the rumors of Lazarus have raised quite a stir. In fact, the word on the street is that the Sanhedrin wants to assassinate both Jesus and Lazarus. People are curious, expectant, and jubilant. They want a Messiah very badly. And this man, with his ability to perform such miracles, is their primary candidate.

⁹Tenney (p. 127) notes that Daughter of Zion is “a personification of the city of Jerusalem” in the OT, especially in the latter prophets (Isa 1:8; 52:2; 62:11; Jer 4:31; 6:23; Lam 2:4, 8, 10, 13; Mic 4:8; Zeph 3:14; Zech 2:10).

Some in the crowd laid their garments on the ground. Others cut palm branches (cf. Rev. 7:9; 1 Macc 13:51; 2 Macc 10:6-7) from the trees in the adjacent fields and laid them down for the colt to walk on.¹⁰ Both of these are political and regal gestures. In other words, the crowds welcome Jesus as King in the Holy City (2 Kgs 9:13).

As Jesus crests the Mt. of Olives, this huge multitude breaks into jubilant shouts which echo across the city. Its sheer volume has attracted everyone's attention, and its Messianic implications have generated excitement. From Psalm 118:25-26, viewed by the Rabbis as Messianic, they borrow such phrases as "Hosannah" and "blessed is he who comes."¹¹ And they add to these such Messianic words as "David," "Kingdom," "Peace," "Glory in the highest." Their message rings out loud and clear. Predictably the Sanhedrin is fit to be tied. Jesus will deal with them shortly.

In addition to the Sanhedrin, this parade of praise no doubt catches the attention of the Roman garrison. They are stationed in Jerusalem as peace-keeping forces. They are especially cautious during Jewish feasts, when the political and religious sentiments of the Jews are at fever pitch. Now they will watch carefully the man who rides into town with such acclamation. We are probably not far off when we picture a thick line of bodies on either side of the path from the base of the mountain to its peak. As Jesus moves down the mountain the crowd falls in line behind him forming an ever-growing, impressive parade heading straight for the temple courts.

4. Ignorance of the Disciples

¹⁶At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him. Jn 12:16-18

¹⁷Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. ¹⁸Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him.

The disciples are as excited about all this as the crowds are, and for the same wrong reasons. They too share the popular misconceptions about the Messiah. In fact, they won't get it straight until after Jesus is glorified (i.e., ascended). The beauty of this event is not in what it could lead to (an earthly kingdom) but what it comes from (OT prophecies).

¹⁰Today the only palm trees in the area are in Jericho. This has led some to say that they carried these branches from Jericho about 13 miles away. This may have been part of the celebration of Tabernacles. But the text seems to indicate that they cut them right there. Obviously, then, palms used to grow around Jerusalem but have been thoroughly stripped from the area (cf. B.A. Mastin, "The Date of the Triumphal Entry," *NTS* 16 [1969-70]: 76-82).

¹¹The word Hosannah literally means, "Save now." But during Jesus' day the word "hosannah" had, for the most part, lost original meaning and was merely an expression of praise, much like our own use of the word "Amen." However, there is something almost prophetic about the crowd's call for "Hosannah" on the first day of the Passover week.

5. Pharisees

Lk 19:39-40

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

⁴⁰“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

Jn 12:19

¹⁹So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”

The Pharisees are fit to be tied. They understand the implications of both the actions and words of the crowds. Jesus is making a play for the throne and the crowds are falling in line behind him. In the mind of the Pharisees, Jesus has an obligation to call a halt to his disciples before their excitement burgeons into an open revolution.

Far from stopping them, Jesus says, “Their praise is both accurate and inevitable. If they stop the stones will start.” They demand that Jesus suppress the crowd. But Jesus stands nose to nose with them and calls their hand. On this day, they are a few cards short. They have neither the popular appeal nor the official power to do anything but stand idly by and watch. The battle lines are drawn and they’ll not be idle long.

6. Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem

Lk 19:41-44

⁴¹As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

We are tempted to rejoice in Jesus’ victory over the Pharisees. But Jesus doesn’t gloat; he weeps. The word itself indicates deep sobs. His interest is not in winning an argument but a people. On the surface it seems that he has done just that. But he knows their hearts. Within five days, many of those shouting “Hosanna” will change their tune to “Crucify him!” They are committed to Jesus as their liberator king. When he is arrested as a rebel, they will abandon him as a dangerous subversive.

As he stands over the city, perhaps looking directly into the temple courts, he pleads for her peace. Not a political peace at the end of a bloody uprising, but peace with their God. That is his ultimate goal, but their eyes are blinded to this. When Jesus refuses to be the Messiah they want, they will kill him. As a result, the vengeance of God will fall full upon the very stones of this city. Within forty years, the Romans will see to it that not one stone remains upon another. Jesus will describe this in more detail in just three days, from this very spot (Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 21). But for now, his prophetic warning gives way to tears. Surely this would have greatly confused his disciples, if indeed, any of them notice.

7. Entrance into the Temple

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

Mt 21:10-16

¹¹The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

¹⁶“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

“From the lips of children and infants

you have ordained praise”^a?”

^a 16 Psalm 8:2

¹¹[Jesus] looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out {of the city^{MT}} to Bethany {where he spent the night^{MT}} with the Twelve.

Mk 11:11 with

Mt 21:17

By the time Jesus makes it through the city gates, everyone is buzzing about him. The NIV translation of verse 10, “The whole city was stirred” is somewhat understated. The word translated “stirred” is used elsewhere in reference to the shaking of an earthquake (Mt 27:51; Rev 6:13). The Jerusalem residents and the Passover pilgrims ask those at the head of the parade, “Who is this?” “Jesus the prophet from Nazareth” is all the answer they need and the one they already suspect.

The sick of the city make their way to the outer court of the temple, the only one in which they were allowed. It was common for the sick and lame to sit at the temple gates and beg from those entering (cf. Acts 3:2). Somehow they find their way to Jesus through the mass of bodies and crooked necks. As if there wasn’t enough excitement already, Jesus heals them. Even the children have formed a choir to echo their parents’ praise.

The Pharisees, who have already accosted him, are now bolstered by the Sadducees. Since Jesus is taking over their territory in the temple, they must ask him to quit in spite of the fact that he is doing wonderful things! It may sound strange that religious leaders object to Jesus healing. We must understand, however, that healing was one of the evidences of Messiahship (cf. Isa 35:46). In fact, when John sent ambassadors to question Jesus about his ministry, instead of a long logical defense, Jesus simply said, “See what I do. These are the healing wonders of Messiah” (Mt 11:2-6).

Jesus responds by saying, “Have you never read?!” That’s like accusing a preacher of not knowing John 3:16. Based on Psalm 8:2, they should have been more sensitive to the praise of these kids. It is not that this passage is so famous, but that this event is so obvious. What a contrast! On the one hand you have the praise of the people, the sick being healed and children worshiping God. On the other hand you have the religious leaders wanting to put a stop to it because it is out of their control.

Such hypocrisy deserves more than this minor rebuke. It will, however, have to wait until the next day. Jesus has already used up the bulk of the afternoon with the Triumphal Entry and this healing service. He merely scopes out the problem, returns to Bethany with his inner band of twelve, and sleeps on it. But the fireworks are coming on Monday!

§ 129a
Cursing of the Fig Tree
(Mt 21:18-19;
Mk 11:12-14)

At this point, Matthew condenses his narrative. This has two results. First, it looks as if the cleansing of the temple took place on Sunday afternoon, while Mark clarifies that it took place on Monday. Second, he makes it look like the cursing of the fig tree and the lessons drawn from it took place at the same time. Again, Mark clarifies that there was a twenty-four hour interval between the two.

Mark's twenty-four hour interval is valuable not just for understanding the chronology, but also the theology of this passage. You see, Jesus curses the fig tree on Monday. The disciples don't notice it until Tuesday. Between these two events, Jesus cleanses the temple. Thus we understand that the withered fig tree is a symbol of Israel's future. It is kind of like an enacted parable.



Mk 11:12-14 with
Mt 21:18-19

¹²The next day {early in the morning^{MT}} as they were leaving Bethany {on his way back to the city,^{MT}} Jesus was hungry. ¹³Seeing in the distance {by the road^{MT}} a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. {Immediately the tree withered.^{MT}}

Early on Monday morning Jesus hikes two miles back to Jerusalem for some unfinished business in the temple. Jesus shouldn't have been hungry yet. Jews normally only ate two meals a day: 10 a.m. and 6-7 p.m. It was still too early for "breakfast." Perhaps in all the excitement of the previous day Jesus missed his supper. That would not be the first time Jesus missed a meal because of business (Mk 3:20; 6:31).

Up ahead, off to the side of the road, Jesus notices a fig tree in full leaf. Passover time was unusually early for fig trees to leaf out. But normally, with the leaves came the green buds which would mature into figs. They are bitter but edible. Jesus goes to the tree looking for the fruit that its leaves promise. He finds nothing but leaves.

Jesus has been criticized for expecting figs before their time. After all, "It was not the season for figs." That criticism misses the point. The leaves promise there will be green fruit. But there isn't. What's worse, without the green fruit now, there will be no figs later.

Jesus has also been severely criticized for using his divine power to destroy an inanimate object in a fit of anger.¹² This too misses the point. Jesus isn't

¹²T.W. Manson, "The Cleansing of the Temple," *BJRL* 33 (1951): 259 says, "It is a tale of miracu-

wreaking vengeance on a deceitful tree. He is using this opportunity to teach his disciples a valuable lesson, especially in light of what he is about to do in the temple. To Jesus people are more valuable than things. He places more value on teaching his disciples than on an inanimate object. This same lesson was to be learned at the loss of 2,000 pigs in Gerasa. Besides, this tree is unproductive. It is taking up space on God's good earth without doing its job. It is absurd to picture nature weeping the loss of its valued comrade through the whimsical anger of Jesus. It is a useless tree.

It has the appearance of a fruit-bearing tree, but it is not. So Jesus curses this unproductive tree as he is about to curse an unproductive temple which doesn't bear appropriate fruit. There is no way they could have predicted from his words — “May no one ever eat fruit from you again” — how immediate and severe the demise of this poor tree will be. Matthew says that it withers immediately. Within twenty-four hours, when they pass this spot again, they will notice that it has withered from its roots (Mk 11:20). Now that is “immediate” in any arborist's book!

Matthew, Mark and Luke place this cleansing at the close of Jesus' ministry. John, however, places it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Now, no one will deny that the Gospel writers sometimes place events topically rather than chronologically. But such a radical revision by John, writing after the Synoptics, could be construed as misleading and inaccurate. Therefore, Jesus likely cleansed the temple twice, once at the beginning and once at the close of his ministry (cf. Morris, pp. 288ff).

**§ 129b
Second
Cleansing of
the Temple
(Mt 21:12-13;
Mk 11:15-18;
Lk 19:45-48;
cf. § 31)**

¹⁵On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out {all^{MT}} those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written:

Mk 11:15-17
with Mt 21:12

“My house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations^a?
But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’^b”

^a 17Isaiah 56:7 ^b 17Jer. 7:11

The first gate Jesus comes to, when entering Jerusalem from the east, leads right into the temple court, that is, the court of the Gentiles. What he sees borders on the bizarre. There are pigeons, and sheep and oxen (Jn 2:14). There are boxes and crates and haggling. There are tables where the Roman currency is

lous power wasted in the service of ill temper (for the supernatural energy employed to blast the unfortunate tree might have been more usefully expended in forcing a crop of figs out of season); and as it stands is simply incredible.”

exchanged for the kosher sheqel required for the temple tax.¹³ It is chaotic and it is infuriating.

At the first cleansing Jesus wove together a whip out of strands of rope. We are not told that he made a whip this time. But there is still a good bit of force needed to overturn the tables of the money changers. Mark adds this interesting tidbit: Jesus “would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple court.” Merchants were using the court of the Gentiles as a shortcut to the road leading east over the Mt. of Olives (Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:108 and *M. Ber.* 9.5). Jesus’ vengeance is not only against those who are selling but also those who are buying.

It is an impressive scene. Businessmen on their hands and knees scrambling to collect their coins scattered across the pavement. Sheep, oxen, goats, and pigeons running wildly, frightened by all the turmoil. People pushing and shoving trying to get out of their way. The Sadducees are scowling from the sidelines, furious that Jesus has interfered with their financial gain. But there is really not much they can do about it. The populace supports Jesus, especially after that impressive parade the day before, and hates the obvious corruption of the temple. Were the Sadducees to intervene the people would likely rally and riot in support of Jesus (Mk 11:18). Furthermore, the Roman garrison is watching carefully with their hands on their swords. If a fight breaks out, the Romans could swiftly and eagerly end it.

The point, however, is not that the house was dirty and needed spring cleaning. Nor was it even that these poor pious Gentiles didn’t have a quiet place to pray. Jesus’ critique is twofold. First, from Isaiah 56:7 he suggests that the temple should be open to all people. The context (Isa 56:1-7) suggests that the Messiah would attract all people groups to come and worship God. Thus, he would bring an end to the “exile” of God’s true children. Second, from Jeremiah 7:11, Jesus threatens the present leaders (cf. Jer 7:1-16). As in Jeremiah’s day, they felt secure in their sin since they controlled the temple. However, God declared that if they did not mend their ways the temple would be destroyed. No wonder they respond to Jesus so violently. Yet this is nothing unexpected. Malachi (3:1-3) foretold as much.

Mk 11:18 with
Lk 19:48

¹⁸The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching {[and] hung on his words^{LK}}.

It is clear that Jesus is winning the multitudes. Both the Sadducean sect (chief priests) and the Pharisaic sect (teachers of the law) want to kill him. Moreover, since temples were used as tools for “monumentalizing” emperors and kings through their reconstruction and defense, Herod would likely also

¹³J. Neusner, “Money-Changers in the Temple: The Mishnah’s Explanation,” *NTS* 35 (1989): 287-290.

take this as a personal assault.¹⁴ They are afraid of the power that Jesus wields over the multitudes. Furthermore, Roman authorities closely monitored the monies of the temple and filched funds through taxation. Thus, Jesus' cleansing of the temple had political and economic ramifications beyond the boundaries of Judaism.¹⁵ These leaders are clearly more concerned about their positions of authority than the possibility that Jesus is their long-awaited Messiah.¹⁶ This arrogance and selfishness will blind them to the bitter end.

**§ 130a
Some Greeks
Want to See
Jesus
(Jn 12:20-36)**

Jesus has just cleansed the temple. Specifically, he drove out the rabble from the court of the Gentiles. Now the proselytes can pray properly. Jesus is their hero. So it's no surprise that one group of Greek converts wants to talk to Jesus.

²⁰Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²²Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

Jn 12:20-26

²³Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

These Greeks are apparently proselytes at the gate. They came up to Jerusalem to worship the God they believed in but had not yet entered the covenant relationship through circumcision. There was obviously something about Philip that attracts them. Perhaps it is his name. After all, he and Andrew are the only two called by their Greek names from the very beginning. Philip takes them to Andrew who is famous for bringing people to Jesus (cf. Jn 1:41; 6:8-9).

Andrew is Peter's brother. He is the only one in the fishing business excluded from the inner three. But next to them he was probably closest to Jesus. Thus, it makes sense that Philip brings these Greeks to Andrew. He would have the best shot at escorting them to Jesus.

Well, Andrew tells Jesus that these Greeks want to see him, but we never find out if they get to. All we are given is Jesus' response to "them." Does that

¹⁴H. Betz, "Jesus and the Purity of the Temple," *JBL* 116/3 (1997): 455-472.

¹⁵Cf. J.M. Dawsey, "Confrontation in the Temple," *PRS* 11 (1984): 153-165.

¹⁶The high priesthood was quite lucrative and had become thoroughly corrupt. Josephus reports that Jesus ben Gamaliel bought the position of high priest with a bribe (*Ant* 20. 213). He also says that some higher ranking priests would beat the lower ranking ones to steal their rightful tithes from them (*Ant* 28. 181 & 206-207). Furthermore, they would sometimes overcharge worshipers up to 25 times the value of a sacrificial animal. This made them feared and hated (cf. C.A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?" *CBQ* 51 [1989]: 237-270).

refer to Philip and Andrew or to the group of Greeks? Whatever it means, we know that a crowd of Jews surrounding Jesus hears his reply (v. 29).

This response seems pretty unrelated to the request of the Greeks. But it is exactly what they need to hear. They want to become part of God's people, and they will. But they will be included because Jesus dies for their sins, not because they convert to Judaism.

We're not so surprised to see foreigners seeking Jesus. After all, the centurion (§ 55) and the Syro-Phoenician woman (§ 78) have already pursued Jesus. But this present group is a clear sign that the end of the road is just ahead. Jesus reflects on that briefly and packs into his response a few choice warnings for his would-be followers.

Jesus' execution will shake the disciples to their very core. Therefore, they must remember that Jesus' death is as necessary as the death of a wheat kernel. If a wheat seed is not buried in the ground, there will be no harvest. Likewise, if Jesus isn't killed and buried, there will be no resurrection, no church, no Gentile inclusion (cf. Isa 53:10; Lk 24:26; Rom 3:23-25; 5:12-21). And what goes for Jesus, goes for the disciples. They too must die (cf. Mt 10:37-39; 16:24-26; Mk 8:34-38; Lk 9:23-26; 14:26; 17:32, 33). After all, you can't follow Jesus without going where he goes.

Jn 12:27-29

²⁷"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

²⁸Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus knows what is coming and is disturbed. He expresses his grief in verse 27. How we punctuate this verse makes a difference. The first phrase is certainly a question. But the second phrase may well be a declaration rather than a question as the NIV punctuates it. If we understand it as a question, we hear Jesus say, "Should I really say, 'Father save me from this hour?' No, because that is why I came!" However, if we understand it as a statement, then we hear Jesus say, "Father, I know what is coming and I don't want to go through with it. . . . However, I came to accomplish this very thing, so let's get on with it."

This second view would make this statement very much like the prayer of Gethsemane (cf. Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42). Jesus is beginning to understand the overwhelming implications of Calvary. It is not surprising that he does not want to go through with it. But he is not driven by self-indulgent desires. He is more interested in his Father's glory than his own comfort. He doesn't have to, but he faithfully executes the Father's plan.

Jesus' prayer is intense! It is full of commitment to the Father and personal pathos. God respects and responds to his Son in this decisive moment with an audible affirmation. This is the third and last time God speaks audibly during

Jesus' ministry. Each time was a critical moment: at his baptism (Mk 1:11), transfiguration (Mk 9:7) and now, as he solidifies his commitment to the cross.

Many of the people do not understand the voice and so attribute the sound to thunder (cf. Acts 9:7; 22:9). Others are convinced that the words come from an angel. But Jesus hears it loud and clear, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again." This was no doubt a welcome and timely endorsement from the Father.

³⁰Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³²But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

Jn 12:30-34

³³He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

³⁴The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

Although these words must be a great comfort to Jesus, they are even more desperately needed by the crowd. They will watch as Jesus is crucified in three or four days. That punishment is only reserved for the vilest of criminals. Jesus is to be the recipient of the wrath of man as well as the wrath of God when the judgment for man's sin falls upon him. It will not look good for Jesus. For those who love him, it will seem like Satan had conquered. For those who hate him, it will look like God has vanquished him (cf. Isa 53:10). Neither is really the truth. Jesus dies willingly, taking the penalty that belongs to us.

Even the crowd recognized this metaphor "lifting up"¹⁷ in reference to his death. Only they believed the Messiah's reign was to be permanent. "How can you be the Messiah," they asked, "if you are going to die?" Now that was a good question in light of Isaiah 9:7 (cf. Ps 110:4; Ezek 37:25; Dan 7:14).

³⁵Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. ³⁶Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Jn 12:35-36

Jesus is the light (see comments on v. 46). Anyone who accepts Jesus receives his light in them just as a candle might be lit from a bonfire. But in a few short days, darkness will fall (i.e., the crucifixion). Jesus will raise from the dead, but most of his appearances will be private and only to the disciples. True enough, people will still be able to obtain the light (i.e., accept Jesus) through the disciples, but that will be much more difficult. The best time to follow Jesus is as he stands before them.

After saying this he went out from the crowd and hid himself. If this event took place on Monday, Jesus would come out of hiding within sixteen hours.

¹⁷"The verb *lifted up* (*hypoō*) is used in John exclusively to refer to Jesus' death (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34)" Tenney (p. 131).

But his big day of discussions on Tuesday would be his last. It is possible that this event took place on Tuesday afternoon. If that is the case, then these are the last public words of Jesus. The next time he shows up before a crowd would be Friday morning in Pilate's Praetorium. They will then shout, "Crucify him!"

§ 130b
Blind Eyes and
Dead Hearts
(Jn 12:37-50)

³⁷Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. ³⁸This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet:

"Lord, who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"^a

³⁹For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah

says elsewhere:

⁴⁰He has blinded their eyes
and deadened their hearts,
so they can neither see with their eyes,
nor understand with their hearts,
nor turn—and I would heal them.^b

⁴¹Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

^a38 Isaiah 53:1 ^b40 Isaiah 6:10

This section summarizes the entire public ministry of Jesus. He has constantly backed up his claims with miracles (Jn 2:11, 23; 3:2; 4:48, 54; 6:2, 14, 26; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18; esp. 20:30). But even with these, the people, by and large (v. 42), would not believe. The imperfect verb tense "were not believing" describes their continuing unwillingness to turn to Jesus. It is not because the miracles are faulty. Nor is it entirely the fault of the Jews. God has hardened their hearts (Rom 11:25).

The first passage is quoted from Isaiah 53:1. Even in its original context it appears to be a conversation between the Messiah and Jehovah. Even though Jesus preaches the truth and verifies it with miracles, the Jews refuse to believe. The second passage is from Isaiah 6:10 and is part of Isaiah's commission to preach. It is quoted two other times in the NT (Mt 13:14-15 [cf. Mk 4:12; Lk 8:10] and Acts 28:26-27). All four times it appears in the Bible it highlights the hardening of the Jews. In Matthew the "credit" for the hardening is laid at the preacher's feet. That is, Jesus taught in parables so that the religious leaders would *not* understand his message. In Acts, the "credit" is laid at the listener's feet. They had every opportunity to respond to God's message but did not. And here, the "credit" is laid at God's feet. That's because the hardening of the heart is a progressive and cooperative effort between God and men. As men turn their backs on God, he withdraws his Spirit from them. Thus, they are less likely to repent and turn back to God. This is a frightening proposition. (See comments on Mt 13:14-15, § 64b).

Verse 41 is an astounding statement equating Jesus with Jehovah. It says that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory. But turning back to Isaiah 6:1 it says, "I saw the

Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.” The chapter goes on to describe the praise offered to the preincarnate Christ. Clearly, John viewed Jesus as the very God.

⁴²Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

⁴⁴Then Jesus cried out, “When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. ⁴⁵When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. ⁴⁶I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”



This paragraph is a fitting summary of Jesus’ ministry and teaching. First, there was always a mixed response to Jesus even among the leaders (v. 42). Most rejected him but many did not. Those who did believe Jesus often kept their mouths shut so that they would not get kicked out of the synagogue. We might call them cowards. However, we must remember that by being ejected from the synagogue they would have lost their jobs, their families, and their respect in the community. It was a heavy blow. But verse 43 clarifies what was of greatest value to them: The praise of men. Indeed, man’s praise is a dangerous thing to desire. It is fickle and demanding and often requires one to reject God’s Word and ways.

Second, Jesus highlights two personal characteristics that have epitomized his public ministry: (1) His intimate union with the Father (cf. Jn 1:14; 3:35; 5:18-23; 5:26; 5:36-37; 5:45; 6:27; 6:32; 6:45; 7:16; 8:16; 8:18-19; 8:27-28; 8:41; 10:30; 10:38; 12:49-13:1), and (2) the light he brought to this world (Mt 4:16; Lk 2:32; Jn 1:4-5; 1:7-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9-10; 12:35-36; 12:46). The implication of both of these characteristics is obvious. When we believe in Jesus, we too will experience intimacy with the Father, and we will no longer live in darkness but will walk in the light.

⁴⁷“As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.”

Jn 12:47-50

⁴⁸There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. ⁴⁹For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. ⁵⁰I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”



This paragraph picks up another old discussion. Jesus did not come to judge but to tell us the truth about God (cf. Jn 5:24, 25-47; 8:31, 37, 51; 14:23-24). In fact, his words are the very words of God, (see comments on 7:16; cf. 3:11; 8:26, 28, 38; 14:10). Therefore, when a person rejects Jesus he or she rejects God. Thus, they are judged not by Jesus but by their own rejection of God’s word. On the flip side, following the words of Jesus leads to eternal life.

§ 131
Lessons from
the Withered
Fig Tree
(Mt 21:19b-22;
Mk 11:19-25;
Lk 21:37-38)

[MK 11:]¹⁹When evening came, they went out of the city.
20In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered
from the roots. ²¹Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look!
The fig tree you cursed has withered!"
²²"Have faith in God," Jesus answered.

[MT 21:]²¹"I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only
can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to
this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done."

[MK 11:]²⁴"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have
received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵And when you stand praying, if you hold anything
against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."




Tuesday morning the apostolic band marches back to Jerusalem from Bethany. Peter is the first to notice the fig tree withered from its very roots. The *unstated* lesson of Jesus here is about the position of the faithless religious leaders. Based on the structure of Mark's narrative, we conclude that this fig tree is a symbol of the Jewish leaders (cf. Jer 8:13; Hos 9:10; Mic 7:1-6; Nah 3:12). Their appearance was deceitful. Outwardly they looked like productive trees — they did all the right things. But upon closer inspection, they had no real fruit. As Jesus literally predicted the demise of Jerusalem on Sunday afternoon (Lk 19:41-44), he does so here symbolically with the fig tree.

Jesus' *stated* lesson is about prayer. He prayed against the fig tree with dramatic results. Jesus' disciples can also pray with that same power. But there are two parameters in this text around effective prayer: faith and forgiveness (cf. Mt 6:14-15, § 54f). Without faith in God and forgiving those who have wronged us, our prayers are anemic.

Does this mean that prayer is a *carte blanche* calling card for those who pray in faith? No. If we are correct in assuming that the cursing of the fig tree is a picture of the cleansing of the temple, then we might assume that the prayers Jesus is speaking about are specifically in reference to faithless Israel. Even though the unbelief of the Jewish leaders seems like a daunting obstacle (a mountain), it can be overcome through faithful prayer.¹⁸ Jesus may have even waved his hand toward the Mt. of Olives or even Mt. Zion to illustrate his point.

If we take this passage alone, we could potentially pray for some extravagant and frivolous things (cf. Mk 10:35). A number of other parallel passages place some parameters around our prayers. For example, we should ask:

1. In faith (Mt 21:22), and obedience (1 Jn 3:22).
2. With persistence (Lk 11:9; 18:1-6).
3. According to the will of Jesus (i.e., "In my name"), (Jn 14:13-16; 15:16; 16:23-26; 1 Jn 5:14-15), remaining in him (Jn 15:7).

¹⁸M. Moulton supports this position that the lesson on prayer must also be connected with the cursing of the temple. "Jesus' Goal for Temple and Tree: A Thematic Revisit of Matt 21:12-22," *JETS* 41/4 (1998): 561-572.

4. In cooperation/conjunction with other believers (Mt 18:19).
 5. With unselfish motives (Jas 4:2-3).

And we are to pray for:

1. God to send workers into the harvest (Mt 9:38).
2. The Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13).
3. That which is necessary in order to bear fruit (Jn 15:16).
4. Wisdom (Jas 1:5).

So while we don't believe that we can just ask for any old thing, we mustn't deny the power of prayer. Ephesians 3:20 says, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us . . ." The very real danger to most Christians is not asking extravagantly, but not asking at all.

³⁷Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, Lk 21:37-38

³⁸and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

Luke makes it sound like Jesus camped out on the Mt. of Olives each evening of the last week. While the warm weather of Palestine would certainly permit this, it is more likely that he made the trek across the Mt. of Olives back to Bethany where he was likely housed by Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Each day he returned to the temple courts early in the morning to teach. When he arrived the people gathered around him, eager to hear what he would say next.

The last two days have been good for Jesus' popularity polls. The Triumphal Entry on Sunday and the cleansing of the temple on Monday have attracted a lot of attention. It is now early Tuesday morning in the temple. The people have already gathered around Jesus. The Jewish leaders must do something. What we have here is their attempt to discredit Jesus and win back their following.

**§ 132a
Jesus'
Authority
Questioned by
the Sanhedrin
(Mt 21:23-27;
Mk 11:27-33;
Lk 20:1-8)**

[MK 11:27]²⁷They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts {teaching the people and preaching the gospel,^{LK}} the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ²⁸"[Tell us^{LK}] By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

²⁹Jesus replied, "I will {also^{MTLK}} ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ³⁰John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!"

Right out of the blocks the Sanhedrin is in Jesus' face. You can already tell that this is going to be a full day, packed with questions and controversies. In

fact, there are more details given about this day in the life of Jesus than any other. Matthew devotes nearly one sixth of his gospel to it.

Representatives from all three “branches” of the Sanhedrin are there: Chief priests (Sadducean), teachers of the law (Pharisaic), and elders (“lay” leaders). They come with what seems to be an innocent and fair question: “By what authority are you doing these things?” After all, Jesus had just cleared out the temple the day before. In other words, he intruded into the temple mount, the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin. Part of their job would be to oversee the proceedings during the Passover at the temple. This is especially true since the Romans are looking on from the Tower of Antonia, eager to pounce on any potential Jewish revolt. Thus, it was their job to protect both the Jewish religion and the civic peace of their people.

Ostensibly their question was reasonable and fair. But Jesus saw through their motives. They were still looking for an opportunity to trap him in his words, accuse him of blasphemy, and turn public opinion away from him. So Jesus appropriately answers their question with a question. Now that may sound to us like Jesus is trying to evade their question. But it was common in Rabbinic debates to answer a question with a question. That would not sound to them like avoidance, but like leading. It was assumed that Jesus would answer their question but that he first wanted to lead the discussion in a certain direction. In addition, the answer they give to Jesus’ question will become the answer to their own. By answering Jesus, they will get the answer they seek.

Because John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus, and because their message and purposes were the same, their authority would also be the same (Jn 1:19, 26-27; 3:25-30; Mt 11:7-10). So Jesus asks this counter question: Was John’s baptism from heaven or from men. In other words, was John’s authority from God or was he just out there “doing his own thing.” Jesus concentrated on John’s baptism because it epitomized his whole ministry and because it was at that point that the Jewish leaders refused to follow his teaching (Lk 7:30).

Mt 21:25b-27 with
Lk 20:6; Mk 11:32

²⁵They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’

²⁶But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people {[that they] will stone us,^{LK}} for they all hold that John {really^{MK}} was a prophet.”

²⁷So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

Suddenly the hunters become the hunted. Their private discussion/ debate betrayed the fact that they were in a catch-22. No matter what they say, it will be turned against them. If they say, “John’s authority was from heaven,” then Jesus also gets his authority from the same place. What’s worse, they refused to follow John. Thus this answer would betray their blatant hypocrisy. On the other hand, if they say, “John’s authority was from men,” they might very well get

stoned on the spot. This pilgrim crowd¹⁹ adamantly believes in John. They were still seething over his murder by Herod. Furthermore, just two days ago, they hailed Jesus, John's successor, king at the Triumphal Entry. If these Sanhedrin delegates turn on John (and Jesus), they might very well turn this precarious crowd against them.

So they cop out. "We don't know," they say. Jesus responds in kind. But notice, he didn't say, "I don't know" but "Neither will I tell you." Jesus knows they're not ignorant. They simply refuse to admit the truth. And if they refused the truth before, they are not likely to receive it now. So Jesus doesn't waste his words. They're not looking for an answer but an opportunity. The Master is not about to give it to them.

The Jewish leaders refuse to answer Jesus' question about John's authority (cf. § 132a). Jesus responds to their silence with three appropriate parables. Only Matthew includes all three; Mark and Luke only tell the parable of the vineyard.²⁰ Nonetheless, all three parables are designed to show how the Jews had rejected God's authority through Jesus.

With each parable both the rejection and punishment grow progressively worse. In the first parable, those who reject Jesus are like the wicked son who didn't do what the father asked. In the second, they are like the wicked servants who kill the son and will receive just recompense. In the third parable, they are like those who rejected the king's invitation and will thus be rejected from the Messianic banquet.

PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS:

²⁸"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

Mt 21:28-32

²⁹"I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

³¹"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

§ 132b
**Three Parables
 on Accepting/
 Rejecting
 Jesus**

(Mt 21:28-22:14;
 Mk 12:1-12;
 Lk 20:9-19)



¹⁹In verse 1 Luke describes this crowd as "the people" [*laos*]. Liefeld notes (p. 1013) that in Luke this word always designates a crowd that is receptive to Jesus' teaching. In other words, they were his supporters.

²⁰An abbreviated version of this parable is also found in the Gospel of Thomas. Some suggest that it is the most "original" version (cf. J.D. Crossan, "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen," *JBL* 90 [1971]: 451-465; and J.A.T. Robinson, "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: A Test of Synoptic Relationships," *NTS* 21 [1974-75]: 443-461). However, the editorial changes are better explained as Gnostic heresy, not earlier oral transmission (cf. W.R. Schoedel, "Parables in the Gospel of Thomas: Oral Tradition or Gnostic Exegesis," *CTM* 43 [1972]: 548-560; also K.R. Snodgrass, "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: Is the Gospel of Thomas Version the Original?" *NTS* 20 [1974-75]: 142-144).



Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.”

This is a simple parable. Jesus says, “It’s not those who talk the right talk that honor God, but those who walk the right walk.” While this is obvious to us, it wasn’t to them. You see, in Middle Eastern culture to speak back to one’s father was scandalous, perhaps even worse than disobedience. Thus Jesus’ parable offers not a choice between good and bad but between two evils.²¹

This is the first time that Jesus openly applies one of his parables to the Jewish leaders (Carson, p. 449). They are scandalized by it. Why would tax collectors and prostitutes enter the kingdom ahead²² of religious folks? According to the story, they repented and did what God asked them to do. Now, the Pharisees would be shocked at Jesus’ implication that they were not working for God. Their lives were devoted to his work . . . or so they thought.

The work God requires is not so much “church business,” but trusting Christ. Jesus put it this way, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent” (Jn 6:29). At first the tax collectors and prostitutes rejected God’s plan through their wicked lifestyles. But when they heard John, they repented and were baptized and subsequently followed Jesus. Their leaders, however, talk about doing God’s will, but are not obedient to it. For when John came preaching a baptism of repentance, they refused to submit (Lk 7:30). And now that Jesus stands before them, they are trying to figure out a way to kill him.

PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD:

Mt 21:33-39 with
Lk 20:9-16;
Mk 12:2-5

^{33^a}Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey {for a long time. ^{LK^b}} ^{34^a}When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect {some of^{MK^c}} his fruit {of the vineyard. ^{MK,LK^d}}

^{35^a}The tenants seized his servants; they beat one {and sent him away empty-handed, ^{MK,LK^e}} killed another, and stoned a third. ^{36^a}Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. {He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. ^{MK^f}} ^{37^a}Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do?^{LK^g} Last of all, he sent his son {whom I love^{LK^h}} to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

^{38^a}But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other {talked the matter over, ^{LKⁱ}} ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ ^{39^a}So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.” {When the people heard this, they said, “May this never be!” ^{LK^j}}

²¹ W. Langley, “The Parable of the Two Sons (Mt 21:28-32) against Its Semitic and Rabbinic Backdrop,” *CBQ* 58/2 (1996): 228-243.

²² The word *proagō* may indicate “taking precedence over,” not merely “entering before.” Thus, the implication *may* go so far as to say that sinners enter “instead” of the Pharisees.

Vineyards were among the most common agricultural ventures of Jesus' day. Frequently a landowner would purchase and prepare the property and then lease it out to tenants. The tenants would then raise the crop and give a certain percentage of the product or proceeds to the owner (generally 25-30%). Furthermore, the vineyard was a frequent OT metaphor for Israel (Isa 5:1-7; Ps 80:6-16; see also Jer 2:21; 6:9; 8:13; 12:10; Ezek 15:1-8; 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1). No doubt these Pharisees are keenly aware that Jesus used the vineyard to represent their people.

Jesus describes a vineyard that is particularly well prepared with: (1) a wall, to protect the crop from wild animals and thieves; (2) a winepress, so the grapes could be harvested and "stomped" into wine right there on the site; and (3) a tower, where a worker could watch for fires or robbers.

Once the vineyard had been prepared and its workers contracted, the owner was free to take an extended leave of absence. When the harvest rolled around, he sent his servants to collect his share of the crop (Mk 12:1-2). Blomberg (p. 323) notes that Jesus' language sounds much like John's at this point: "Fruit in keeping with repentance" (Mt 3:8; cf. 3:10; 7:16-20; 12:33; 13:8, 24-26; 21:19). This may even allude to Psalm 1:3.

The behavior of the tenants was scandalous! Instead of paying their bills, they beat (the word can also mean to flay or flog) and killed the collectors. This didn't just happen once, but repeatedly. The owner is at his "wit's end." What can he do? He decides to send his very own son!²³ Surely in his presence they will repent and meet their obligations.

However, when they saw him coming up the road they discussed the matter among themselves. They reasoned that the owner must be dead and the son has come to collect his inheritance.²⁴ So, if they kill the son, there will be no one else to demand the vineyard from them. The property and all its proceeds will be theirs. Thus, they killed the son and threw him out of the vineyard.²⁵ The people standing around Jesus gasp in shock. "May this never be!" they say. But it would be, and sooner than they could possibly imagine.

²⁰"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

Mt 21:40-42

⁴¹"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent

²³The word "beloved" [*agapētos*] (Lk 20:13) is sometimes virtually synonymous with "only" [*mono-genes*] in the LXX (e.g., Gen 22:2). Therefore, we might see an allusion in this passage to Jn 3:16, Jesus' baptismal narrative (Mt 3:17; Lk 3:22), and his transfiguration experience (Mt 17:5).

²⁴*Klēronomia* was, in fact, sometimes used for "usurping" property rights (LXX 3 Kgs 20:15-16 [our 1 Kgs 21:15-16]; Josephus *Ant.* 8:359-360; *Wars* 2:249. K. Snodgrass, "Recent Research on the Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Assessment," *BBR* 8 (1998): 187-216.

²⁵Matthew and Luke have the son thrown out of the vineyard first and then killed (Mt 21:39; Lk 20:15), whereas Mark has him killed inside the vineyard (Mk 12:8). There is virtually no difference in the meaning, unless one takes the vineyard as a metaphor for the city of Jerusalem rather than for Israel. In that case, Jesus was taken out of the city first and then killed. However, this interpretation probably reads more into the text than Mark intended.

the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

^aJesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone^a;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes^b?"

^a42Or cornerstone ^b42Psalm 118:22,23

No landowner is going to put up with this kind of behavior. So when Jesus asks, "What will he do to those tenants?" the answer is obvious. He will destroy them and replace them with tenants who will respect the owner and pay their debts.

Just as with the previous parable, they know the correct interpretation but badly miss its application. They are the wicked tenants. God has sent prophets to them time and again whom they beat and killed (Jer 20:1-2; 26:20-23; 1 Kgs 18:4, 13; 2 Chr 24:20-21; Mt 23:34; Heb 11:37). Now God is sending them his very own Son.²⁶ But they are plotting to take his life in order to save their own positions and prestige (cf. Jn 11:45-54, § 119). They are about to fulfill Psalm 118:22. They will reject Jesus by killing him. With that act, Jesus will be placed by God as the cornerstone.

Jesus introduces Psalm 118:22 with this insulting retort, "Have you never read?" (Mt 12:3; 19:4; 21:16; Mk 12:10). It was a common Messianic psalm to which they had not paid much attention. You can understand why. A rejected cornerstone was a novel idea. This "cornerstone" could stand for three different construction stones. It may be a *cornerstone*. That was the first and most important stone laid in the foundation of a building. If it was laid correctly the whole building would be straight. Second, the *capstone* was the "roof" of a building and was the final stone which held all the pillars in place. Third, the *keystone* was the last stone put in the middle of an arch. Once it was in place, all the supporting beams could be removed. Now the idea of a cornerstone would best fit the first part of verse 44 — falling on this stone is detrimental to your health. However, the capstone or keystone would best fit the second part of verse 44 — if this stone falls on you it will crush you. Perhaps Jesus intends a dual metaphor here.

This metaphor comes from Psalm 118:22 and originally signified the Jewish nation. Other nations would mistreat them, but they were precious to God. Here, however, Jesus claims to be the representative or even the embodiment of the entire nation.²⁷ What is true for the nation of Israel is true of Jesus as an individual, as the Messiah. Surely we are correct in applying this Psalm messianically.

²⁶This may well be the first time Jesus publicly claimed to be the "Son of God." Caiphas would remember this and bring it up against Jesus in just three days during the trial (Mt 26:63).

²⁷F.F. Bruce, "New Wine in Old Wine Skins: III. The Corner Stone," *ExpT* 84 (1972-73): 231-235.

The early church certainly did (Acts 4:11; Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:7). We read “salvation talk” in the verses that surround Psalm 118:22 (cf. 21, 25). We are called back to the Triumphal Entry (Mt 21:9) by v. 26, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”²⁸

One final note on Psalm 118:22. It is followed by these words in vv. 23-24, “The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. *This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*” Although the death of Jesus was a horrible injustice against God incarnate, it is also the source of our salvation. As ugly as it is, we cherish it. Indeed, its beauty is shrouded in blood.

⁴³^aTherefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴^aHe who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”^a

Mt 21:43-46
with Mk 12:12



⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet. {So they left him and went away.^{MK}}

^a44 Some manuscripts do not have verse 44.

The “vineyard” of God would be stripped from these wicked tenants and given to people who will give God his due. Initially we see these new tenants as tax collectors and prostitutes. But eventually they will include even the Gentiles.²⁹ There are great blessings in store for those who accept Jesus, but frightening consequences for those who don’t. They will be crushed to dust by this very stone they attempted to cast out (cf. Isa 8:14; Dan 2:35, 44).



The implications of this parable are more than they can stand. They want to arrest Jesus in the worst way. But the crowds hang on every word he says. They were both insulted and impotent, which is a bad combination.

PARABLE OF THE WEDDING BANQUET:

This parable has several similarities to one told in Luke 14:15-24. But they are told at different times, with different details and for different purposes. It simply does not seem reasonable to view them as stemming from the same “core” and being edited into their present form. Certainly Jesus was clever enough to create two entirely distinct parables from a single theme, especially one as common and rich as a “banquet.”

²⁸ Blomberg (p. 325) notes that “Matthew has not introduced so many scriptural quotations into one chapter since his infancy narratives (chaps. 1-2), and they continue to pervade the rest of his Gospel.”

²⁹A.A. Milavec, “Mark’s Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen as Reaffirming God’s Predilection for Israel,” *JES* 26/2 (1989):289-312, based on a redactional comparison of Mk 12:1-12 and Isa 5:1-7, concludes that this parable is not about Jesus and the church but about God’s continuing predilection for Israel. While his interpretation is untenable, Milavec does offer a valid warning against anti-Semitism based on this parable. The primary point of Mt 21:43 is not Gentile inclusion but faith in Jesus.



Mt 22:1-7

¹Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ²The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

⁴“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

⁵“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.”

The NIV leaves the first word of verse one untranslated. It says that Jesus “answered” [*apokritheis*]. It may be nothing more than a literary formula, which introduces a new discussion. Then again, it may suggest that Jesus is somehow responding to the Jewish leaders’ desires, facial expressions, or even words which we are not privileged to know.

Wedding banquets often lasted for several days. Therefore preliminary messengers were sent out to alert the guests of the upcoming gala so that they could make plans to attend. When the day rolled around for this banquet to begin, the king urgently sent out the messengers to tell the guests to come immediately since the morning meal [*ariston*] was on the table. The banquet was often used to symbolize the fellowship between the Messiah and his people (Mt 8:11; Lk 13:29; Rev 19:9). We should also keep in mind that the Messiah is often symbolized as a bridegroom (Mt 9:15; 25:1; Jn 3:29; Eph 5:25-32; Rev 21:2, 9).

Quite unexpectedly, those who were invited refused to come. In fact, they refused persistently (as is implied by the imperfect verb tense). So the king sent out even more messengers to try to entice them to come with descriptions of the sumptuous feast awaiting them. But they “blew them off.” Some went to work in the field and others to business meetings. Still others didn’t merely ignore the messengers but actually beat and killed them. The king’s rage and response were predictable. The entire first guest list was wiped out by the king’s militia and their city was burned. This is a pretty potent picture of judgment using OT imagery.

Mt 22:8-14

⁸“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.

¹³“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

¹⁴“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

The king was not satisfied merely with vengeance; he had a banquet hall to fill. His son was getting married and he wanted a party fit for a king. Hence, the



invitation went out to all the citizens of the kingdom, both great and small. The messengers were sent to every street corner and fork in the road [*tas diexodous ton hodon*] where people might be found. One of the guests, however, had not dressed appropriately for the banquet. Kings in ancient times would often provide wedding garments for their guests. Whether or not that is the case here, the man's silence betrays his guilt and disrespect by not adequately preparing to come to the king.

Even the king's address, "Friend," is a rebuke (cf. Mt 20:13). Such a man is cast out, not because he is unworthy to enter, for all the present guests were unworthy. He is cast out because he, like the first guests, refused to enter worthily.

Verse fourteen helps us understand much about the sovereignty of God. It says that many³⁰ are called (NIV "invited"), but few are chosen. How are they called? The messengers in the parable represent the prophets who were rejected and killed. Their preaching was the invitation — the calling. And how were they chosen? By their willingness to respond to the call of God (i.e., the preaching). According to this text, the call of God is not irresistible. God's election includes our response as well as his choice.

In the following passages we will read about four questions. The first three are asked by Jesus' opponents, representing the three major political/religious parties of the day: Herodians, Sadducees, and Pharisees. In turn, they each try to trap Jesus with a particularly difficult question. Not only does Jesus answer their questions so well that they don't dare ask him another, but he perceives and exposes their true hypocritical and hostile motives in the process. Finally, Jesus asks his own difficult question which no one is able to answer. This will end the discourse between Jesus and his enemies. There is nothing left to talk about. Now their only recourse is assassination.

§ 133
Question #1,
by Herodians:
**Paying Tribute
to Caesar**
(Mt 22:15-22;
Mk 12:13-17;
Lk 20:20-26)

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words {so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor.^{LK}} ¹⁶They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians, {spies, who pretended to be honest.^{LK}} "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? {Should we pay or shouldn't we?^{MK}}"

Mt 22:15-17 with
Lk 20:20; Mk 12:15

The first group to try their hand at outwitting Jesus is a tag-team of Pharisees and Herodians. Under normal circumstances, these two groups were

³⁰It was common for the word "many" to signify "all" or "most everyone" in Semitic usage.

enemies. The Pharisees represent the religious right wing. The Herodians, on the other hand, believe the road to peace and prosperity in Palestine is alignment with Rome. Since no one did that better than the Herod family, they are supporters of the Herods in their various governmental positions.

Through their false flattery they act like they sincerely want an answer. They say to Jesus: (1) You are a man of integrity, therefore, we can follow your example in this. (2) You accurately teach the will of God, therefore we can trust your opinion on this. And (3) you are not swayed by men, therefore we can believe your answer will be unbiased.

No one is fooled by their false flattery. It is clear that their simple question, “Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?” is designed to trap Jesus. If he says, “No,” the crowds will be delighted, of course. They hate taxation. More than one third of their income goes to pay Roman taxes. In addition, the coin itself has an offensive inscription: “Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus” and on the flip side, “*pontifex maximus*” (“the most high priest”). While the crowds would have loved Jesus to ban taxation, the Herodians would have immediately arranged for his arrest and execution. On the other hand, if Jesus says “Yes, we should pay taxes to Caesar,” the people, urged on by the Pharisees, will stop following him. After all, any Messiah who can’t throw off the shackles of Roman domination (and especially taxation) is not worthy of support. Jesus is trapped!

Mt 22:18-22

¹⁸But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, ²⁰and he asked them, “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?”

²¹“Caesar’s,” they replied.

²²Then he said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

Lk 20:26 with
Mt 22:22

²⁶They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent. {So they left him and went away.^{MT}}

Jesus knows what they are up to and calls them on the carpet. It must have hurt being identified publicly as a “hypocrite.” But the big sting is yet to come. Jesus calls for a coin. The very fact that they have a Roman denarius in their possession indicates they accept Roman rule at some level. After all, you can’t accept a government’s right of coinage without also admitting its right of taxation.

Jesus simply holds up the coin and asks whose picture is on it. They must have seen where he was headed even as their answer slips from their tongues. The logic is so simple and yet so profound: Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give to God what belongs to God. The word “give” is literally “give back.” Thus, Jesus implies that our taxes are obligatory. That is, we owe them to the government as surely as we have financial obligations to God as part of our stewardship.

This has some ponderous implications. First, a government does have the right to taxation. If we cheat on our taxes, we are disobeying the ordained authority of God (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17). We don't obey a government because we like what it does, who's in charge, or how it spends its money. Indeed, there are appropriate occasions for civil disobedience (Acts 4:19; 5:29). However, these should only be reserved for times when the government asks us directly or individually to disobey what God has commanded us to do or not to do.³¹

Second, the image on the coin is Caesar (Tiberius). Obviously, if his picture is on it, then it belongs to him. But as Jesus looks around the audience, he sees men and women who are as clearly imprinted with the image of God. They have an obligation to give their lives to him. But even now, Jesus the Messiah stands before them. Instead of following him, as God intended, they are trying to trap him. They are, in this very moment, robbing God of his due.

The Pharisees and Herodians are stymied. They have laboriously contrived this “impenetrable” question. Their scheme was foolproof. Yet in less than fifteen seconds this uneducated Galilean dismantles their question, exposes their motives, and convicts their hypocrisy. All they can do is walk away with their tails between their legs. Strike one — the Herodians are out. The Pharisees, however, will be back for a second beating.

[MK 12:]¹⁸ Then {that same day^{MT}} the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ¹⁹“Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother.” ²⁰Now there were seven brothers {among us.^{MT}} The first one married and died without leaving any children. ²¹The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. ²²In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. ²³At the resurrection^a whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

§ 134
**Question #2,
by Sadducees:
Marriage in the
Resurrection**
(Mt 22:23-33;
Mk 12:18-27;
Lk 20:27-40)

^a23 Some manuscripts *resurrection, when men rise from the dead*

Here comes “round two”: The Sadducees. This group died out with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. So the little we know of them comes from the Bible (only mentioned fourteen times in the Gospels), from Josephus, and early Christian writers. Since all of these sources were “enemies” of the Sadducees we should handle our information with care. Nevertheless, the Sadducees were apparently the religious “liberals,” denying any kind of a resurrection, either in the form of angels or spirits (Acts 23:8; cf. Josephus, *Ant* 18.1.3-4; *Wars* 2.8.14). They also apparently prioritized the Pentateuch over the rest of the OT, and certainly denied the validity of the oral traditions of the

³¹ Cf. A. Stock, “Render to Caesar,” *BibT* 62 (1972): 929-934.

Pharisees. It looks like they were the dominant force in the priesthood, hence they would also control the temple.

They, too, come to Jesus with a cool civility, philosophic “objectivity,” and false flattery. Their question concerns Levirate marriage as it would apply to the resurrection. All three Synoptics clarify that the Sadducees do not believe in a resurrection. Thus their goal is not to trap Jesus with a false dilemma or to illicit any kind of real answer from him. Rather, they try to force him to deny the concept of resurrection by showing how ridiculous it would be with a “worst case scenario” of Levirate marriage (loosely citing Deut 25:5 and Gen 38:8).³² In doing so they would not only defeat Jesus, but the Pharisees as well. Levirate marriage was not at all common in Jesus’ day, if even practiced at all. In fact, the only two recorded examples of it in the OT are Tamar (Gen 38) and Ruth (1:11-13; 4:1-22).

Nonetheless, if all seven brothers had this woman as their wife, trying to fulfill their obligations to provide an heir for their brother(s), to whom would she belong if a literal bodily resurrection were true? Would that not necessitate a “heavenly incest?” They could have made the same point with just two brothers, but seven makes the point all the more vivid and ludicrous.³³

Mk 12:24

²⁴Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?”

Lk 20:34-36

³⁴The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.”

Jesus is going to give two answers to their question. The first relates to the power of God and the second relates to the Scriptures, both of which the Sadducees are ignorant. First, the Sadducees apparently believe the resurrection would necessitate a new body like this present one, including sexual attributes. But God can give us new bodies that are beyond the bounds of marriage.

Marriage is an excellent idea in our present world. It provides a resource for intimacy, procreation, and protection of the family unit. But in the resurrection,

³²Edersheim (II:399) gives a number of examples showing how ridiculous the Rabbinic extrapolations of resurrection had become. For instance some suggested that even if someone was buried naked that they would be raised clothed in likeness to a kernel of wheat. And another suggested that our resurrection bodies would look exactly as our present bodies based on the apparition of Samuel (1 Sam 28:14). Still another said that all Jews were to be raised from Palestinian soil. Hence, for those buried in foreign soil, there were cavities underneath the earth through which their corpses would roll until they reached the Holy Land.

³³This tale of seven brothers may have been inspired by the apocryphal story of Tobit (3:8-9; 6:13-15; 7:11). It tells of a certain woman named Sarah, whose seven husbands were killed on their wedding night by a demon that afflicted her (cf. P.G. Bolt, “What Were the Sadducees Reading? An Enquiry into the Literary Background of Mark 12:18-23,” *TB* 45/2 [1994]: 369-394).

none of those things will be necessary. Procreation will be a thing of the past for the new earth will be filled already with saints of all ages. Nor will we have the need for intimacy provided through sex. In heaven, we will have the capacity for intimacy with many people without jealousy or competition. And the family unit will no longer be necessary because (1) there will be no need for protection, and (2) it will have already served its function in teaching us the structure of our relationship with God. The only value of sex, then, would be physical pleasure. Granted, that's no small thing. But is it not reasonable to believe that God, the giver of good gifts, could replace sexual pleasure with an even greater sensation in our new bodies? The bottom line is that sex will not be needed or missed.

Now, when Jesus says that we will be “like the angels,” he does not mean to imply that we will share each and every quality they have. In fact, the primary comparison is in the fact that we will no longer die, and also *perhaps* that angels do not engage in sexual intercourse. This mention of angels would also conflict with Sadducean beliefs since they denied not only the fact of resurrection, but the angelic nature of those resurrected bodies (Acts 23:8).

“{Have you not read in the book of Moses?^{MK}} ³⁷But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ ³⁸He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive. {You are badly mistaken^{MK}}

Lk 20:37-38 with
Mk 12:26-27

³³When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching. Mt 22:33

³⁹Some of the teachers of the law responded, “Well said, teacher!” Lk 20:39-40
⁴⁰And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Jesus’ second answer concerned the interpretation of the Scriptures. His rhetorical question, “Have you not read . . . ?” was, no doubt, taken as it was intended — as an insult (cf. Mt 21:42). Now, there are a couple of passages in the OT that describe a resuscitation (1 Kgs 17:22; 2 Kgs 4:35; 13:21) and a few that speak of resurrection (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2; Job 19:25-27; see also 2 Sam 12:23; Isa 53:10-12; Eccl 12:7). But admittedly they are not as clear or as many as we would like. What complicates the issue further is that the Sadducees prefer the Pentateuch above other portions of the OT. If Jesus is going to convince them, he will have to do so on their own ground.

Quoting from Exodus 3:6, Jesus uses typical and acceptable Jewish interpretation.³⁴ Arguing from the verb tense, Jesus asserts that the resurrection is a logical necessity. But more than this, God’s immense greatness demands his servants be raised in his presence.³⁵ That is, God is the God of the living and not

³⁴ Rabbi D.M. Cohn-Sherbok argues that Jesus’ logic is NOT acceptable Jewish hermeneutic. He goes so far as to say that Jesus’ argument is “strikingly inadequate from a rabbinic point of view. The fact that Jesus could use such an argument should not surprise us, since it bears out the truth of the Gospel tradition in suggesting that Jesus was not a skilled casuist in the style of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (“Jesus’ Defence of the Resurrection of the Dead,” JSNT 11 [1981]: 64-73). Indeed,

the dead. Strictly speaking, however, Jesus only logically argues for the immortality of the soul. Nevertheless, the Jews would not have considered the immortality of the soul apart from bodily resurrection.

Jesus then jibes them again by saying, “You are badly mistaken.” One might get the impression that Jesus is just plain rude to these fellows. But they are mistaken about the final and greatest evidential miracle that Jesus is going to perform. If they miss this one there is no other hope for them to repent and find eternal life. Yes, Jesus’ words are stern, perhaps even harsh, but they are fitting for such a critical topic and time.

Again, the crowds are duly impressed. The teachers of the law (Pharisees) are pleasantly surprised. They had frequently debated with the Sadducees over this very issue and could not, with their cumulative wisdom, come up with an argument as cogent and conclusive as Jesus’. The Sadducees are confounded. They had nothing to say in response and no more questions to ask. Strike two — the Sadducees are out.

§ 135
Question #3,
by Pharisees:
Which Is the
Greatest
Commandment
(Mt 22:34-40;
Mk 12:28-34;
cf. Lk 10:25-27)

[MT 22:34] Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.

[MK 12:28] One of the teachers {experts^{MT}} of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

In the first round the Pharisees sent their disciples along with the Herodians to try to trap Jesus. They were soundly defeated. They went out and regrouped, deciding to send one of their “hot-shot” legal professors rather than a novice this time. He arrives in time to watch the Sadducees try their hand at outwitting Christ. They had no better luck than did the Herodians. This, of course, delighted the Pharisees.

Jesus’ argument was unique, but not because he was a bumpkin, rather because he was brilliant! True enough, the Sadducees would likely have rejected Jesus’ conclusions, but the primary teachers of the law congratulated him on his answer which stymied the opposition (Lk 20:39-40)! Furthermore, F.G. Downing, “The Resurrection of the Dead: Jesus and Philo,” *JSNT* 15 (1982): 42-50, notes a number of similarities between Jesus’ and Philo’s handling of Exodus 3:15. Therefore we can, in fact, conclude that Jesus’ answer would have been acceptable hermeneutical logic to the Pharisees if not to the Sadducees.

³⁵ J.J. Kilgallen puts it this way, “Those judged worthy of life with Yahwah must rise, for His love for them knows no other conclusion” (“The Sadducees and Resurrection from the Dead: Luke 20:27-40,” *Biblica* 67 [1986]: 478-495). J.G. Jansen “Resurrection and Hermeneutics: On Exodus 3:6 in Mark 12:26,” *JSNT* 23 (1985): 43-58, goes a step further. He speculates that Exod 3:6 and Mk 12:26 deal with the same problem, namely barrenness which is metaphorically a “living death” from which God rescued them through “generational resurrection.” Thus the tripartite formula “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” is a statement of God’s faithfulness and saving acts, especially in the context of Exod 3:6. If God saves his people by raising their dead seed (Rom 4:19; Heb 11:11-12), will he not also raise them from death?

Now this legal expert seems to be more amiable to Jesus than the others. (1) He notes that Jesus has given a good answer to the Sadducees. (2) He asks a more reasonable and more important question. (3) He acknowledges the beauty of Jesus' answer. So (4) Jesus affirms his integrity by saying that he, himself, is not far from the kingdom of God.

The lawyer's question was a common debate among the Pharisees. With six hundred and thirteen OT commands and innumerable oral traditions, the answer is not a simple one. We should also note that this is not the first time Jesus has been asked this question. One day a lawyer came to Jesus and asked him "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus turned the question back on him by asking, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" The lawyer answered by citing these same two commands. This became the springboard into the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37; § 103). Hence, neither the question nor Jesus' answer is new.³⁶

²⁹"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'^a ³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."^b

^a29 Or *the Lord our God is one Lord* ^b30 Deut. 6:4,5

Mk 12:29-30

³⁸"This is the first and greatest commandment."

Mt 22:38

³¹"The second is this {like it:^{MT}} 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'^c There is no commandment greater than these."

Mk 12:31 with
Mt 22:39

^c31 Lev. 19:18

⁴⁰"All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Mt 22:40

[Mt 22:37-39 and Mk 12:29-31 = Lk 10:27, see comments on § 103]

The first command, from Deuteronomy 6:4-6, is called the *shema*, named after the first Hebrew word in the sentence, "Hear." Pious Jews recited it at the beginning and end of each day and it opened the synagogue services each Friday evening. This was the "John 3:16" of Judaism. This passage was commonly placed in phylacteries and mezuzahs.³⁷ It affirmed the unity of God and our obligation to love him with our entire being. For the Jew, there was no greater obligation and no greater theological tenet. Jesus chose wisely the greatest commandment.

³⁶In fact, E.E. Lemcio, "Pirke 'Abot 1:2(3) and the Synoptic Redactions of the Commands to Love God and Neighbor," *ATJ* 43 (1988): 43-53, suggests that the combination of Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18 is based on a statement by Simeon the Just (c. 350-200 B.C.E.): "On three things the world stands: On the Torah, on the [Temple] service, and on deeds of lovingkindness" (*Pirke 'Abot* 1:2 [3]).

³⁷O.S. Brooks, "The Function of the Double Love Command in Matthew 22:34-40," *AUSS* 36/1 (1998): 7-22.

The astute student will observe that while there are only three descriptors in Deuteronomy (heart, soul, strength), Mark uses four, adding *mind* to the list. The reason is that the third Hebrew word can indicate a couple of different things. Mark (12:30) and Luke (10:27), both writing to a more Gentile audience, use two Greek words (*mind* and *strength*) to adequately translate that single Hebrew word. None of these four, however, are mutually exclusive. All of them are intertwined.

The second greatest command comes from Leviticus 19:18. Once we recognize that our greatest obligation is to love God, the obvious question is, “How does one express his love to God?” Certainly we can do so through liturgy and worship, that is, religious piety. But this is not so very helpful in the community.³⁸ God would rather us show our love to him by meeting the needs of our fellows (Mt 25:40, 45) which, according to Jesus, is anyone we come in contact with (Lk 10:25-37). If we keep these two commands we will, by necessity, fulfill all the crucial features of the entire Old Testament law (Rom 13:8, 10; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8).

Mk 12:32-34

³²“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

³⁴When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.



This “lawyer” is impressed. Jesus strikes a chord in his Jewish heart. For the true Jew there is nothing more central than the love of the one true God and charity shown to our neighbor. These are more important than all the liturgical signs of piety such as offerings and sacrifices (1 Sam 15:22; Hos 6:6).

Not only is this legal expert impressed with Jesus, Jesus is impressed with him. He has approached Jesus respectfully and has asked him a serious and important question. Now he publicly acknowledges the beauty of Jesus’ answer. So Jesus affirms him by saying, “You are not far from the kingdom.” We’re not told if he ever entered or not. This little tidbit reminds us that all of Jesus’ opponents are not all bad. The Pharisees are not evil incarnate. They are religious leaders with a lot of pride and position to protect. Coming to Christ was a serious sacrifice for this group.

Well, that was strike three — the Pharisees are out. All three major religio-political parties have tried their hand at trapping Jesus, only to be badly rebuffed. It is no small wonder that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

³⁸A. Malamat shows that “love” used intransitively (only 4 times, Lev 19:18, 34; 1 Kgs 5:1; 2 Chr 19:2), is not about an emotion, but an action. He explains, “The Bible is not commanding us to *feel* something — love — but to *do* something — to be useful or beneficial, to help your neighbor. This understanding also eliminates from the passage what some have considered an inappropriate adoration of self-love” (“Love Your Neighbor as Yourself,” BAR 16 [1990]: 50-51).

Jesus answered these three questions from the three major parties of the day. They have no more questions for him. So Jesus has a question for them. It was really the only question left to be answered — the only one that really matters: Who is Jesus?

^[MT 22:41]While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus {was teaching in the temple courts [and]^{MK}} asked them, ⁴²“What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?”

“The son of David,” they replied.

⁴³He said to them, “{How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David?^{MK}} How is it then that David {himself,^{MK}} speaking by the {Holy^{MK}} Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’ {in the book of Psalms?^{LK}} For he says,

⁴⁴“The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet
{make your enemies a footstool for your feet.^{LK}}^{ab}

⁴⁵If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. {The large crowd listened to him with delight.^{MK}}

^a42Or Messiah ^b44Psalm 110:1

By the end of this third round the Jewish leaders are thoroughly frustrated and the crowds are ecstatic. This is a major league spectacle! Now that Jesus has disarmed all their ambushes, he turns the tables and they have to answer a question of his.

It was a simple question, “Who is the Christ?” Well, that would be David’s son (progenitor); everyone knew that (cf. 2 Sam 7:13-14; Isa 9:2-7; 11:1, 10; Jer 23:5; etc.). “All right,” Jesus says, “that being the case, let’s exegete Psalm 110, beginning at verse 1. How can the Christ be both the son of David and his Lord (*adonai*)?” Now that was a more difficult question for a couple of reasons. First, in their culture, the father was always greater than the son. There is simply no “natural” way that David would call one of his offspring his Lord. Second, this Psalm was understood as a Messianic Psalm, predicting the coming of the Christ. It is also the most often cited OT passage in the NT (cf. Acts 2:34-35; Heb 1:13; 5:6; 7:17, 21; 10:13). They couldn’t dodge it or deny it. After all, it was Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit, so says Jesus (cf. Jn 10:35; also Acts 4:25; Heb 3:7; 9:8; 10:15; 2 Pet 1:21). But neither could they explain it!

The implication is that this human Son of David (referring, of course to Jesus [Mt 1:1; Lk 3:23, 31]) was also the divine Son of God (Paul states this clearly in Rom 1:3-4). There were ample indications of this in the prophets (Isa 9:6; Jer 23:5-6; 33:15-16; Zech 12:10; 13:7). That being the case, their accusations of blasphemy are false and their resistance to Jesus as Messiah is resistance to the very God, himself.

They have not been able to explain the first half of the first verse of Psalm 110. Jesus does not even get into the second half of the verse: “Until I make

§ 136
Question #4,
by Jesus:
How Can the
Christ Be
David’s Son?
 (Mt 22:41-46;
 Mk 12:35-37;
 Lk 20:41-44)



your enemies a footstool for your feet!" That would have been a frightening proposition for these antagonistic questioners. Jesus could have further elaborated on verse 2: "The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion." Or again, verse 4: "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." How does a king become a priest? The answer will come at Calvary.

This must have been a serious embarrassment and a shock to these "Bible scholars" to suddenly realize how little they know about the basics of their faith. They are stunned by this uneducated Galilean. Not only has he slipped through their theological nooses, but he has stumped them with a simple question from one of their favorite Bible verses. And he does all this in the midst of the temple courts, while they have home-field advantage! The leaders are stymied; the crowds are ecstatic.

§ 137a

**"Woe to You,
Teachers of
the Law and
Pharisees"**
(Mt 23:1-36;
Mk 12:38-40;
Lk 20:45-47;
cf. Lk 11:37-54)

This is the conclusion to Tuesday's teaching in the temple. The Jewish leaders have likely withdrawn in defeat (Mt 22:22, 34, 46). They go off to plot Jesus' assassination. The crowds, however, continue to grow in number and delight. Jesus turns to them with this surprisingly acrimonious rebuke of the Pharisees. It is so strong, in fact, that some have sensed a conflict between Matthew 23 and the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). However, even the Sermon on the Mount contained some frighteningly stern warnings (e.g., Mt 7:13-29). And this speech is concluded with some tender concern for the Jewish people (vv. 37-39).³⁹ Furthermore, Jesus has said this kind of thing before in a variety of places and situations (e.g., Lk 11:37-54). It is merely catalogued here more fully. Finally, we must remember that these Pharisees have just tried to trap him and are presently planning his death. Jesus' response, therefore, is both warranted and fair.

After an introductory warning to the disciples (vv. 1-12), Jesus delivers a series of seven "Woes." This word "Woe" [*ouai*] can contain pathos, anger, warning and derision; and may include a bit of all of them at the same time. The first six seem to come in pairs. One and two deal with the Pharisees' evangelism; three and four deal with their ritual; and five and six deal with their inner vs. outer purity. The grand finale, number seven, gets at the heart of the matter: their desire to murder Jesus.

³⁹Any accusation that Jesus was anti-Semitic here fails to recognize that: (1) Both Jesus and his "biographer," Matthew, were Jews themselves and had a passion for Jewish evangelism. (2) Jesus does not rebuke all the Jews but merely one segment of their leadership. And this rebuke was for the "category" of Pharisees, but would not necessarily extend to each individual Pharisee. (3) This group had just tried to trap him and were presently plotting his assassination. (4) Jesus spoke the truth. He accurately described the character of this group. And (5) Jesus' words are no harsher than many of the Psalms and Prophets (e.g., Ps 58; Isa 5:8-23; Jer 23; Hab 2:6-20).

¹Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ²"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."

Mt 23:1-4

Jesus' audience includes two groups: his disciples and the less committed crowds who are merely there for the show. It is a bit difficult, however, to determine how much difference there is between these two groups. On the other side of the fence, Jesus' target also contains two groups: The Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law. There is even less clear distinction between these two groups. The word "Pharisee" connotes a religio-political/theological group, whereas "teacher of the law" describes the scriptural/educational function of basically the same group of people with the same "leanings." The distinctions are few and subtle.

These men sit on Moses' seat. There actually was a seat in the synagogue which represented Moses' seat. Here sat the primary teacher of the synagogue. It was *the* prominent seat of position and power in the community. It represented the line of succession that extended clear back to Moses himself. This dominant teacher supposedly carried the mantle of Moses' leadership, the torch of faith from earlier generations. Our closest equivalent would be the pulpit as a symbol of authoritative teaching. Whoever "owns" the pulpit has the ears of the congregation. This position belonged to the Pharisees.

"So," Jesus says, "do everything they tell you." Now Jesus could not have meant that absolutely. The Pharisees had literally thousands of nitpicky rules laced throughout their oral traditions. Jesus himself purposefully broke the foolish oral teachings of the Pharisees (Mt 9:10-13; Mk 2:18-19, 23-24; Lk 6:6-8; 11:38-39; Jn 5:8-10). Certainly he is not saying, "Follow all their nitpicky rules." What he means is, "To the extent that they teach what Moses taught, follow them" (cf. Deut 17:10). But that, of course, requires adding to what Jesus actually said. So we might want to read a bit of sarcasm into what Jesus said. After all, sarcasm was not completely foreign to Jesus. Hence we might paraphrase Jesus words, "O sure, they occupy pretty important places of authority, therefore you are safe in following their words, but following their example will kill you!"

The OT law was hard enough to keep. But these guys added to it meticulous rules that only a lawyer could understand (or weasel out of). They could keep it themselves because of their superior devotion (not to mention they knew all the loopholes). But the average "Joe(seph)" doesn't have a chance. And they aren't about to help him. Instead, they beat him down with more rules and guilt. That is so different than what Jesus does with us (cf. Mt 11:28-30).

⁵"Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries^a wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'

Mt 23:5-12

^a“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. ^bAnd do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. ^cNor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ.^b ^dThe greatest among you will be your servant. ^eFor whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

^aThat is, boxes containing Scripture verses, worn on forehead and arm ^b10Or *Messiah*

The primary goal of a Pharisee was to get noticed. He did this through titles, position, and performance of religious duties. Jesus mentions two such religious duties here: Bible study (embodied in phylacteries) and prayer (embodied in tassels at the edges of their garments). These phylacteries were small boxes worn on the forehead and/or the left arm.⁴⁰ They held miniature scrolls which usually contained Exodus 13:2-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; and 11:13-21. This practice likely grew out of an overly literal interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18: “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.” They had effectively become like the charms of the pagans. Apparently the Pharisees would make their phylacteries and/or their straps especially large so that they would be easily noticed.

Likewise they enlarged their prayer tassels at the edges of their robes. This was a normal part of Jewish apparel (Num 15:37-41; Deut 22:12). Even Jesus wore tassels (Mt 9:21). They were used much like rosary beads which could be fingered and counted as one recited the obligatory liturgical prayers. But the Pharisees wanted theirs to be extra long so that they would be easily noticed and perhaps to demonstrate just how many more prayers they said than everybody else.

The Pharisees also sought to be recognized through position. We’ve already seen how they aspired to “Moses” seat in the synagogue. And if they couldn’t be the primary teacher of the synagogue, they at least wanted to sit up on the podium in front of everyone where they could be gawked at in their supercilious attainments. When they went to a dinner party, they were zealous to grab the seats of honor, closest to the host (cf. Lk 14:7-11; see comments on § 114).

They wanted to be recognized through titles such as “Rabbi” (lit., “my great one”), “Teacher,” or even “Father” (which appears to have been reserved for the great Rabbis of the past). As we have seen before, Jesus’ injunctions are not always to be taken absolutely (e.g., Mt 5:22, 29; 6:3, 6, 17). Such is the case here. For instance, there is nothing wrong with addressing your biological parent as “Father” or even a mentor (1 Cor 4:15; Acts 22:1; 1 Jn 2:13). Nor is it always wrong to address someone as “teacher” (Acts 13:1; 1 Tim 2:7; Eph 4:11; Jas 3:1). But we should studiously avoid titles which arrogantly promote an individual’s accomplishments or divide brothers by rank. God alone deserves

⁴⁰Cf. J.H. Tigay, “On the Term Phylacteries (Matt 23:5),” *HTR* 72 (1979): 45-53. He points out that the Greek word *phylakteria* referred to charms or amulets. Based on that, he suggests that using *phylakteria* (Gk) to translate *tefillin* (Heb) indicates that these boxes had degenerated into amulets for the Pharisees.

praise and honor. Pompous titles which detract from God by focusing on man are taboo for disciples of Jesus (cf. Jer 31:33-34). The kingdom economy is filled with paradox. The greatest is the least and the least the greatest. He who exalts himself will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be exalted (cf. Mt 18:1-5; 20:26; Lk 14:11; 18:14).

WOE #1: Turning People Away from the Kingdom of Heaven

^{13^a}Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”^a

Mt 23:13



^a13 Some manuscripts to. ¹⁴Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Therefore you will be punished more severely.

Jesus calls the Pharisees hypocrites. That's pretty strong language, straight from the Greek theater. A hypocrite, literally, was an actor who put on a mask to assume a false identity while he played for the audience. This accusation would be particularly offensive to the Pharisees who hated all forms of Hellenization, including the Greek theater.⁴¹ In essence, Jesus was calling them the very thing they hated.

Jesus' critique was right on. The Pharisees at that very moment were doing what Jesus accuses them of. Here he was, the king of this kingdom of heaven, in their very midst. Not only did the Pharisees not accept him, but they zealously tried to hinder anyone else from accepting him either (Mt 11:19; 12:23-24; 21:15). They opposed Jesus.⁴² They threatened members of their own ranks who appeared amiable to him (Jn 7:45-52). And they excommunicated lay people who followed him (Jn 9:22, 34-35). Thus they frightened many people away from the kingdom of heaven.

^{40^a}They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.”

Mk 12:40

Not only were some Pharisees using their religious positions to corrupt new converts, they were using them to fleece widows financially. It may be that they were charging widows for the “services” of their prayers on the widows’ behalf. More likely, however, this verse refers to the Pharisees’ service as guardians of the widows’ estates.⁴³ Such guardians could charge a healthy fee for legal arbitration, and on top of that, they could legally charge expenses to the estate.

⁴¹ Jesus would be familiar with the Greek theater built by Herod Antipas at his headquarters in Sepphoris, less than an hour's walk from Jesus' hometown. Furthermore, the fact that there is no functional equivalent of *hypocrites* in Hebrew or Aramaic indicates that Jesus knew at least a little Greek and threw in this foreign word to spice up his rebuke just a bit (cf. R.A. Batey, “Jesus and the Theater,” *NTS* 30 [1984]: 463-574).

⁴² For a full catalogue of Pharisaic opposition to Jesus, see notes on Lk 11:37, § 107.

⁴³ J.D.M. Derrett makes a strong case for this in “Eating up the Houses of Widows: Jesus’s Comment on Lawyers?” *NovT* 14 (1972): 1-9.

Obviously, there was a good bit of latitude for corruption. That's why long oaths and prayers were used to assure the widows of their honesty and to secure their "business."

WOE #2: Turning Proselytes toward Hell

Mt 23:15 ¹⁵"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are."

There is considerable evidence in the first century of Pharisaic proselytizers (Carson, p. 478). But they were not "door to door" evangelists. Rather, when a pagan expressed interest in Judaism, the Pharisees would latch on to him and see that he adopted their particular brand of legalism. As is often the case, their students became even more extreme and zealous than their teachers. It appears that both Peter and Paul fought this same phenomenon in the first-century church (Acts 11:1-3; 15:1-2; 1 Cor 4:6, 9-10; Gal 1:7-8).

WOE #3: Deceptive Oaths

Mt 23:16-22 ¹⁶"Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' ¹⁷You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? ¹⁸You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' ¹⁹You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. ²²And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it."

Apparently, the Pharisees "ruled" that an oath could only be made with something you could use as collateral (Gundry, p. 463). That way, if someone lied, there could be financial repercussions. Therefore, oaths made by the temple or its altar were *not* valid, but oaths made by the gold of the temple or the offering on the altar were valid. But their motive behind this hair-splitting was deception. Their casuistry allowed them to rob people "religiously."

Jesus said that the purpose of oaths was not financial security but honesty. You keep your word, not because you might lose money by breaking it, but because you are answerable to a higher power, ultimately God. Hence, the greater the object of the oath, the more responsible one is to keep it. Therefore, oaths made to the temple and its altar are greater than those made to the gold of the temple or the offering on the altar.

Jesus took it even one step further. When you swear by either the temple or its altar, you swear by him who owns them both. Even if you swear by heaven or its throne, you swear by him who dwells therein. This logic could be extrapolated to all the earth and its contents. Hence, every oath is equally binding. For this very reason, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said not to use oaths at all

(Mt 5:33-37). But “simply let your yes be yes and your no, no. Anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” The bottom line is that we are to be honest people. Any need for oaths, crossed fingers, or legal fine print betrays the influence in our lives of Satan, the Father of Lies (Jn 8:44).

WOE #4: Deceptive Tithes

²³“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ²⁴You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.”

Mt 23:23-24

This is an expansion of what Jesus said in Luke 11:42. The Pharisees were truly impressive in their execution of religious duties. They even tithed the mint leaves and dill seeds from their herbal gardens (which borders on ludicrous). Yet somehow they “missed the forest for the trees.” No doubt, God is pleased with tithing; it ought to be done. But it is not central to his heart as are justice, mercy and faithfulness, which these fellows missed by a mile.

Jesus excoriated them through this cynical proverb: “You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.” Both of them were unclean animals, and neither of them would you want in your soup. But if you had to choose betwixt the two, you ought to eliminate the camel . . . it’s easier to choke on. This is humorous enough in English. But in Aramaic, the play on words (camel [*gamla*] and gnat [*galma*]) makes it even more delightful.

The modern church ought to pay particular attention to this proverb. The little things in the eyes of God are often the most visible to the world (dress, tithing, church attendance, etc.), while the weightier matters are often practiced in private (justice, mercy, and faithfulness). If we’re not careful, we’ll wind up playing for the wrong audience and neglecting God’s priorities.

WOE #5: Unwashed Insides

²⁵“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.”

Mt 23:25-26

Christians today are not so much different than the Pharisees of yesterday. We are more concerned with what people see on the outside than what God sees on the inside. The inner life, which determines our motives and aspirations, demands our attention. It is easy to ignore the cry for inner cleansing as we frantically respond to the external expectations all around us. But once again, the bottom line is: “Who is your primary audience?” Are you playing for God, who looks on the inside, or for men (even religious men), who are only able to see externals?

Jesus identified their inner motives as greed and self-indulgence. That may sound like a description of a profligate, but those of us who are “professional clergy” know all too well that these desires can comfortably fit religious leaders. It is the desire to look good and to be honored by your peers and followers. They are religious desires, but not righteous ones. To be clean before God, we must go deep. The heart is not sanctified through haircuts and ties, attendance pins or titles. Cleansing simply must be from the inside out.

WOE #6: Whitewashed Outsides

Mt 23:27-28

²⁷“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. ²⁸In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Now Jesus takes this cleansing one step further. Not only must cleansing start from the inside out, but when it doesn’t there are dire consequences. Religious leaders who are outwardly sterile but inwardly corrupt can have a contaminating effect on their followers.

The OT declared anyone unclean who touched a dead body (Num 19:16). The Jews extrapolated that to coffins and even tombs. Therefore, about a month before Passover, crews would go out to the area around Jerusalem and white-wash all the sepulchers so that an innocent pilgrim would not inadvertently step on one and be disqualified from participating in Passover. As Jesus made his way to the Holy City just two days earlier, he would be reminded of this again by all the freshly painted graves. You were drawn to their beauty but defiled by their touch. So it was with the Pharisees.

There could hardly be a greater insult to a Pharisee than to call him a coffin. Jesus’ words may be harsh, but they are not inaccurate. The Jewish populace was impressed with the Pharisees. They knew the Scriptures so well. And they were so meticulous with their piety. But their hearts were proud and self-seeking. As people followed the Pharisees, they too had their priorities skewed. They justified themselves for ritual keeping, without feeling obliged to love their neighbor or be merciful with the least and the lost. Thus, they were corrupted by “touching” the Pharisees.

WOE #7: Finale — Murderous Desires

Mt 23:29-32

²⁹“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. ³⁰And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ ³¹So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. ³²Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!”

Worse than all their flaws combined, the Pharisees were seeking to kill

Jesus, the finale of all the prophets. They claimed that they disagreed with their forefathers for killing the prophets. They showed their disapproval by decorating the prophets' tombs. But Jesus says that all this decorating was a continuation of their forefathers' work, not a contrast to it.

[vv. 29-32 = Lk 11:47-48, see notes on § 107]

^{33^a}You snakes! You brood of vipers! [cf. 3:7; 12:34] How will you escape being condemned to hell? ³⁴Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. ³⁵And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation."

Mt 23:33-36

God not only sent Jesus, but other prophets, wise men, teachers and apostles (Lk 11:49). These are probably not merely the martyrs who preceded Jesus, but those who followed him as well. In other words, those who die for the faith die in solidarity with the death of Jesus.

Jesus, the pinnacle of all the prophets, would be killed in just three days. Hence, this generation would become guilty of murdering all the prophets from Abel to Zechariah. We don't know for sure who this Zechariah was but there are at least three possibilities. (1) It might be Zechariah, son of Baris (or Baruch or Bariscaeus, depending on the manuscript one follows). He was killed in the temple precincts in A.D. 67–68 (Josephus, *War* 4. 334-344). Those who accept the inspiration of the Scriptures, or even the honesty of Matthew, must reject that option because it is too late for Jesus' time. (2) It might be the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berekiah (*Zech* 1:1). The only problem here is that there is no scriptural reference to the murder of Zechariah although there are some post-Christian Jewish references to his death. Or (3) it could be Zechariah the priest (2 Chr 24:20-25). Two difficulties arise with his identity. First, he was the son of Jehoiada, not the son of Berekiah, as Matthew says. However, the word "son" often meant "descendant." Hence, Zechariah may be identified as the descendant of a famous ancestor rather than his own father (cf. Carson, pp. 485-486). The second difficulty is that Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada appears to have been murdered in the Holy Place and not the outer court between the altar and the sanctuary (v. 35). However, that may be close enough for Matthew. If this is the right reference, Jesus is speaking of a canonical order (i.e., the order of the books of the OT) rather than a chronological order. Abel was the first person murdered (Gen 4:8-10), Zechariah was the last murdered according to the order of the books of the OT.

Notice, Jesus shifts from a rebuke of the Pharisees to their followers in verse 36. Because they refused to abandon their leaders after Jesus warned them, they too would be held responsible for Jesus' death. The murder of Jesus would bring

the judgment of God on the Holy City. Far from pleasing Jesus, the fate of Jerusalem brings tears to his eyes.

§ 137b
Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem
 (Mt 23:37-39)

Jesus got no pleasure from lambasting the Pharisees (Mt 23). Nor does he rejoice over Jerusalem's impending destruction (Mt 24). Here we see his heart, full of pathos, and his eyes full of tears for what he sees for this city's future.

Mt 23:37-39

³⁷^aO Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. ³⁸Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"^a

^a39Psalm 118:26

This pericope forms a bridge between Jesus' warnings against the Pharisees (Mt 23) and against the city of Jerusalem (Mt 24). It prepares us to read the "Olivet Discourse" in the following chapter. Here Jesus spoke as God did. He uses an OT figure of God for his own desire to gather Israel under his wings (Deut 32:11; Ps 17:8; 36:7; 91:4; Isa 31:5).

These words are almost identical to those found in Luke 13:34-35 (see comments on § 113b), spoken three months earlier in Perea. Although the pericope functions differently in Luke's narrative than it does here, the meaning of the words are essentially the same.

§ 138
Widow's Mite
 (Mk 12:41-44;
 Lk 21:1-4)

Jesus praises this poor woman for her great sacrifice. That's clear enough. But there may be more here than meets the eye. The context of both Mark and Luke is significant. Jesus has just criticized the Pharisees because "they devour widow's houses" (Mk 12:40; Lk 20:47). And in the following verses Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple. Thus this passage may well illustrate how bankrupt religion bankrupts widows.⁴⁴

Mk 12:41-44
 with Lk 21:1

⁴¹Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. {As he looked up^{bK}} Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴²But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins,^a worth only a fraction of a penny.^b

⁴³Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

^a42Greek *two lepta* ^b42Greek *kodrantes*

⁴⁴A.G. Wright, "The Widow's Mites: Praise or Lament? — A Matter of Context," *CBO* 44 (1982): 256-265 & R. S. Sugirtharajah, "The Widow's Mites Revalued," *ExpT* 103 (1991): 42-43.

Jesus leaves the temple courts proper for the last time. He seats himself in the court of the women across from the 13 trumpet-shaped bronze receptacles. Each of these boxes were for different kinds of offerings, with labels telling what the money was for. Jesus watched deliberately and carefully as the rich proudly tossed in fistfuls of coins. As they slid down the bronze coffer and clanked against the metal, they made quite a clamor and no doubt attracted a great deal of desired attention.

In the midst of this spectacle, there came an unassuming widow. In fact, she probably wanted to go unnoticed, a bit embarrassed by her meager gift. You could barely hear her two puny coins in the coffer. They were so small, in fact, that their name *lepta*,⁴⁵ often called *mites*, was derived from the word “to peel.” They were a mere shaving of metal. Together, they were only worth $\frac{1}{64}$ of a day’s wage. They would almost be more of a hassle to count than they were worth, kind of like pennies in our offering plates.

Jesus excitedly calls his disciples. They must have had great expectations as they ran to his side. With all the colossal events that have taken place that day, Jesus must have something for them that is immensely important to get so excited over it. How shocked they must have been to discover that all the hubbub was over two *lepta*. But to Jesus it is a big deal. You see, he doesn’t measure gifts with a scale but with a thermometer. He looks at the size of the sacrifice, not the size of the denomination. People can see only that which is given, but God sees that which is kept (2 Cor 8:1-7, 12). This woman has given more than all the rich because she has kept nothing.

In those days people got paid daily. So she at least had to fast that day for her sacrifice to God. But considering that she was a widow, that may have been the end of her savings and not merely the end of her daily stipend. Like the widow at Zarephath, she gave the last little bit she had to the service of God (1 Kgs 17:12-16).

With her last two *lepta*, she could have barely bought a dinner roll. So perhaps she said, “Big deal, I’m going to go hungry anyway. What’s the difference whether I get one last meal before I am totally dependent on the mercy of God to care for me?” That may be easier to do with a few pennies than with \$1,000. Yet that is the place we need to come to in our faith with financial affairs. If we can’t trust God with our pennies, it is unlikely that he will have control of our more substantial savings.

⁴⁵ “That Mark felt it necessary to explain the value of a *lepton* and that he does so by the use of a Latin coin (*quadrans*) only known in the west suggests strongly, in spite of contrary opinion, that he was writing to Romans” (Wessel, p. 741).