

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE[®]

STUDY BOOK

FALL 2025



**GOOD NEWS
FOR ALL**

The Book of Luke



Thru-the-Bible
Book by Book

STUDY BOOK FALL 2025

For use with *Understanding the Bible's Leader's Guide*.

GOOD NEWS FOR ALL

The Book of Luke

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE®—A quarterly series of Bible book studies that will help you understand the Word of God and apply it to your life.



Study Book is published quarterly by David C Cook, DavidCCook.org. © 2025 by David C Cook, 4050 Lee Vance Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80918, U.S.A. Understanding the Bible® and David C Cook and its related logo are registered trademarks of David C Cook. All rights reserved. ISBN 978-0-781-44645-7 Printed in South Korea. All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Cover Art: © Sarsmis/Getty Images

To equip the Church with Christ-centered resources for making and teaching disciples who obediently transform today's generations . . . David C Cook is a nonprofit organization dedicated to international Christian education.

Volume 34, Number 1 September-November 2025

Luke

Lessons

1. <i>The Savior Comes into the World</i> (Luke 1–2) —————	7
2. <i>Jesus Is Prepared for Ministry</i> (Luke 3:1–4:13) —————	15
3. <i>Jesus Begins Ministering in Galilee</i> (Luke 4:14–6:11) —————	23
4. <i>Jesus Tells How to Live</i> (Luke 6:12–49) —————	31
5. <i>Jesus Continues His Ministry in and around Galilee</i> (Luke 7:1–9:50) ———	39
6. <i>Jesus Begins Moving toward Jerusalem</i> (Luke 9:51–11:54) —————	47
7. <i>Jesus Continues His Ministry in and around Judea</i> (Luke 12–14) ———	55
8. <i>Jesus Teaches through Stories</i> (Luke 15–16) —————	63
9. <i>Jesus Ministers on His Way to Jerusalem</i> (Luke 17:1–19:27) ———	71
10. <i>Jesus Begins His Last Week</i> (Luke 19:28–21:38) —————	79
11. <i>Jesus Faces the End</i> (Luke 22:1–62) —————	87
12. <i>Jesus Is Crucified</i> (Luke 22:63–23:56) —————	95
13. <i>Jesus Is Resurrected</i> (Luke 24) —————	103

Features

<i>Introduction to the Gospel of Luke</i> —————	4
<i>How to Use the Study Book</i> —————	6
<i>Chart—Sources for Luke’s Gospel</i> —————	111
<i>Chart—Jesus’ Parables</i> —————	112

Luke

Luke has been called the most beautiful book ever written. Perhaps this praise has been given because of the number of Jesus' parables included in the Gospel—twenty-eight in all, and more than in any other Gospel. Perhaps it has been given because the Gospel gives a detailed account of the works, teachings, and life of Jesus that are especially important for understanding the way of salvation. Or perhaps the praise has been given because Luke made plain that salvation through Jesus is offered to all people.

Indeed, there are many beautiful aspects to Luke.

The Gospel's orderly arrangement narrates Jesus' life from a point months before His birth to the point of His ascension into heaven. And yet Luke's Gospel is not an eyewitness account. It is evident, however, that Luke carefully investigated Jesus' life and teachings from witnesses (Luke 1:3). Some of those witnesses may have written their own Gospel accounts, such as Mark or Matthew. Some may have told Luke their own testimony of what they had seen and heard, such as some of the apostles and others whose lives had been influenced by Jesus.

In some ways, unlike the other Gospel writers, Luke paid close

attention to historical details. For example, only Luke recorded the names of some of the Roman officials at the time of Jesus' birth. Partly because of Luke's attention to detail, it is easier for historians to approximately date some of the main events of Jesus' life.

Luke portrays Jesus as the divine Redeemer, who "came to seek and to save the lost" (19:10). Accordingly, Jesus is depicted not so much as the Jewish Messiah as He is the Savior for all the people of the world. Time and again Luke emphasized that salvation is not the sole possession of the Jews. It is open to people of all races and all human conditions. The message of Luke is that the salvation provided by Jesus is broad enough to include all people.

One common thread between people of the first century A.D. and people living today is their need for a Savior. Men and women are bruised and battered by life's disappointments and society's injustices. So were the people of the first century. People today must face the awfulness of their own sin, just as people had to do in the first century. And people today can find strength and hope through trusting in Jesus, just as Luke's first reader, Theophilus, may have done when he read Luke.

Author

Even though Luke's name does not appear in the third Gospel, there is plenty of evidence that he was the author of this book. Luke is the first of two volumes (Acts being the second) addressed to Theophilus. In Acts, the author uses the pronoun "we" to indicate those times when he was a traveling companion of Paul's. Paul referred to Luke's companionship in three of his own letters:

- "Our dear friend Luke, the doctor" (Col. 4:14);
- "Only Luke is with me" (2 Tim. 4:11); and
- "Luke, my fellow [worker]" (Philem. 24).

Sources dating back to the second century A.D. give more evidence for Luke's authorship. In a prologue attached to the Gospel, Luke was acknowledged as the author of both Luke and Acts. Around A.D. 170 a list of New Testament Scriptures accepted by the church, called the Muratorian Canon, also credited Luke as the writer of the Gospel and of Acts.

Unlike the other three Gospels,

Luke was written by a Gentile. Possibly born in Antioch of Syria, Luke was a physician. Some Bible historians speculate that Luke may have been a freedman. Greek names with contractions ending in *as* (such as Luke's original Greek name, *Loukas*) were common among slaves. Greek and Roman masters often educated slaves to become doctors and later freed them to practice as physicians. Some historians have even suggested that Luke was born into the household of Theophilus, a government official to whom Luke addressed both his Gospel and Acts.

Luke wrote more than one-fourth of the New Testament—more than any other person. His Greek grammatical construction is generally recognized as among the best in the New Testament. And so are his storytelling-abilities. Luke is not merely a compilation of fragments; it is an integrated story written by a well-informed person.

Purpose

Luke addressed his Gospel to a man named Theophilus. The author called the recipient of his book "most excellent" (Luke 1:3), possibly indicating that Theophilus was an important government official. Perhaps Theophilus, whose name means "lover of God," was already convert to Christianity who yearned to learn more about his

new faith in Jesus Christ. Or perhaps Theophilus wanted to explore the facts about Christ so he could decide for himself what to believe. Either scenario might explain why Luke paid close attention to historical details.

Thus Luke's purpose in writing this Gospel seems to have been to create an accurate, dependable

account of the works, teachings, and life of Jesus.

His own Gentile roots and his Gentile audience explain why his Gospel has a universal perspective. It speaks to the condition of the entire human race, not just to Jews. Luke either omitted Jewish phrases and practices found in

the other Gospels or explained them carefully, making his Gospel helpful and readable for those less familiar with Jewish ways. Perhaps Luke, even though he addressed the book specifically to Theophilus, expected that his Gospel would be read by many others.

Date

Luke 1:2 seems to imply that Luke wrote not only during or near the time of the apostles but also that they were the source of some of his information. Yet there remains some disagreement over when Luke wrote his Gospel.

Because many Bible scholars believe Luke used Mark as one of the sources for his own writing, they say Luke must have written his Gospel sometime after Mark. Therefore, if Mark was written in the A.D. fifties or early sixties, Luke was probably written between A.D. 59 and 63. These dates seem most likely, considering that Luke closed Acts—the Gospel’s sequel—not with Paul’s martyrdom (thought to have taken place about A.D. 67) but with the end of Paul’s first

imprisonment in Rome (thought to have taken place between A.D. 60 and 62).

Other Bible scholars believe Luke must have been written much later—in the A.D. seventies, for instance. However, these scholars allow their personal views to color their judgment. If, for example, these scholars believe no one can predict the future, then they assume that Luke had to be written after A.D. 70. (The Gospel contains a brief prophecy of the temple’s destruction, which actually occurred in A.D. 70.) But by dating the Gospel in this way, they overlook the fact that Acts fails to record Paul’s martyrdom—something Luke almost certainly would have included had it already occurred.

How to Use the *Study Book*

The study book is meant to be used with a Bible opened beside it. Before studying one of the lettered sections within a lesson, read the corresponding Bible passage. Then refer back and forth between your Bible and the study book until you

get the meaning of the passage.

Also think about your personal answer to each of your “Ask Yourself” questions. Finally, come to class prepared to discuss the Bible passage and raise any questions that have occurred to you.

1

The Savior Comes into the World

Luke 1–2

a Luke's Purpose (1:1–4)

Since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

—Luke 1:3–4

The first stories about Jesus circulated in oral form. But as more believers joined the church and as eyewitnesses began to pass from the scene, it became necessary to put Jesus' words and the stories of His deeds into written form.

Several accounts of Jesus—probably including Matthew and Mark—had already been produced by the time Luke decided to write his own. Yet Luke undertook to check all the facts for himself and write an orderly account. Luke was a Gentile doctor (Col. 4:14) from elsewhere, but he certainly could have visited Palestine and talked with some of the people who had known Jesus. For instance, Luke may have learned

UNRELIABLE ACCOUNTS: False Biographies of JESUS

In the Gospel according to the Hebrews, Jesus is reported as referring to “my Mother, the Holy Spirit.” The Gospel according to the Egyptians teaches celibacy as an ideal—even within marriage. The Gospel of Thomas tells of Jesus' performing miracles as a child (see John 2:11). The questionable authenticity of some accounts of Jesus' life shows why Luke found it important to conduct a careful investigation and sort through the claims (Luke 1:3).

many of the details surrounding Jesus' birth from Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Luke's efforts were aimed primarily at a man named Theophilus [thee-AHF-ih-luss]. His title (“most excellent,” v. 3) tells

us that he may have been a public official. Some students of the Bible think that Theophilus had not yet decided what to believe about Jesus and that Luke wrote this Gospel as an evangelism tool. Others think Theophilus may have been someone with influence in Rome and Luke hoped that by his reading this Gospel, he would be convinced to defend Christianity. Still others believe his name (literally, “lover of God”) tells us he was already a believer in Christ. Perhaps he had recently been converted and needed more information in order to grow spiritually.

Whatever the explanation, we can benefit from the information Luke compiled for Theophilus. We should not be satisfied with a superficial knowledge about Jesus if we want to develop spiritually. That’s why Luke’s goal for Theophilus is also an excellent objective for us: “That you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (v. 4). We need to be sure about our faith.

Ask Yourself . . . How sure am I about what I believe? Am I growing closer to Christ and learning more about Him?

Luke 1:5–80 in Brief

These verses describe events preceding the birth of Jesus. The angel Gabriel foretold the birth of John the Baptist to John’s father-to-be, Zechariah. Zechariah was temporarily deprived of the power of speech because he doubted the angel (vv.

5–25). Gabriel similarly foretold the birth of Jesus to Jesus’ mother-to-be, Mary. Unlike Zechariah, Mary believed the angel (vv. 26–38). Mary traveled to Zechariah’s wife—Elizabeth, a relative of Mary’s—and expressed her joyful feelings about God (vv. 39–56). John the Baptist was born and at his circumcision Zechariah’s power of speech was restored (vv. 57–66). Zechariah prophesied about the roles John would play when grown (vv. 67–79). John grew up in a wilderness area (v. 80).

b Jesus Is Born (2:1–7)

While [Mary and Joseph] were [in Bethlehem], the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

—Luke 2:6–7

Luke introduced Jesus’ birth by setting it in its historical context. He mentioned two officials—the emperor of Rome, Caesar Augustus, and the governor of Syria, Publius Sulpicius Quirinius. He also mentioned a political event: the Roman census that drew Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem.

Luke’s historical approach underscores the fact that at Christ’s birth the eternal God invaded temporal

When Was Jesus Born?

Most Bible scholars have concluded that Jesus was born sometime between 8 B.C. and 4 B.C. Here are some of the facts that must be considered:

- Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1) was emperor of Rome from 31 B.C. to A.D. 14.
- One Roman inscription refers to an official who governed Syria sometime in the first decade B.C. and again for a while in the first decade A.D.; this may have been Quirinius (v. 2).
- The earliest Roman census we know about from sources other than the Bible was conducted in A.D. 6. Since these censuses were probably conducted every fourteen years, the ‘first census’ would have been in 8 B.C. However, it may have been delayed a year or more in Palestine.
- Jesus may have lived for as long as two years before Herod the Great died in the spring of 4 B.C. (Matt. 2:16, 19).
- Jesus was about thirty when He began His ministry in A.D. 26 or 27 (Luke 3:1, 23).

human affairs. Not only that, but also God used secular rulers and events to accomplish His purposes.

The Roman census was not so much to count people as to determine who owed taxes and who could serve in the Roman army (though Jews were not subject to military conscription). To comply with the census, Joseph had to travel about seventy miles—at least a three-day journey—from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the town of his ancestors. Mary was almost ready to give birth, so it was not the best time for her to take a trip. But there

was no way Joseph could delay the trip. So they decided Mary should go with him.

Since Bethlehem was filled to overflowing with travelers, there were no suitable accommodations for a pregnant woman. So, tradition says, Mary gave birth to her firstborn son in a cave that had been made into a stable. Some Bible students, on the other hand, think Joseph and Mary stayed in the open courtyard of a crowded inn, where there would have been a series of stalls along the walls. Travelers used the stalls as stables and lean-to



A silver star marks the spot in the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, where tradition says Jesus was born.

Ask Yourself . . . How do I feel when I think of Jesus' being born in the most unfavorable and unpromising of circumstances? What in my life can I relate to that situation?

C Shepherds Hear the Good News (2:8–20)

The angel said to [the shepherds], “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”

—Luke 2:10–11

shelters. Quite possibly, Mary gave birth surrounded by the activity of the courtyard. She wrapped her baby tightly with a cloth strip resembling a bandage. Then she laid Him in a trough used for feeding animals.

Being born in a stable was a humble beginning for the one who would be the Savior of the world! Mary must have wondered how the angel's words about Him (1:32–33) could come true.

We can be thankful, however, that Luke told this side of the story. He showed us how low God stooped to lift fallen humanity. Jesus came as a poor, humble, homeless baby. Because He identified with the lowest, He gives hope today to those who have no other source of hope.

No matter how futile our circumstances might seem, we can find strength knowing that God cared enough to send His Son to experience life as we know it.

An angel announced the birth of the Messiah to ordinary shepherds, not to powerful rulers or religious leaders. Why did God single them out for such an incredible display of heavenly glory?

Possibly God chose to tell shepherds about the birth of His Son to make a point: It is not the influential or the elite who receive God's salvation but those who call for help and place their trust in God. Salvation is for all, including the weak and oppressed—even society's outcasts. In announcing the message of salvation, God wanted the world to know there are no second-class people. He loves us all!

These Bethlehem shepherds may have watched over flocks of sheep reserved for temple sacrifices in

Jerusalem. It is intriguing to imagine these shepherds, so familiar with sacrificial lambs, being the first to see the Lamb of God—the sacrifice for the sins of the world!

The angel brought “good news that will cause great joy . . . for all the people” (v. 10). This was a message of hope for those looking for the Messiah. But it was also good news for those who knew nothing about the Messiah. Jesus was God’s solution to the problem of sin. And this good news still transforms the harsh realities of life into joys of a new life and hope for eternity.

The angel told the shepherds that the Savior “is the Messiah, the Lord” (v. 11). Military and political leaders during those times were frequently called “saviors.” But the angel made it clear that this Savior was unique—He was the Anointed One, the Messiah.

The shepherds stared in amazement, trembling and trying to grasp the significance of the angel’s announcement. Suddenly the night sky exploded with the sounds of angels praising God. They gave glory to God and announced peace for all who receive God’s favor.

People long for peace, but true peace cannot be achieved until individuals experience inner peace, which is possible only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Overwhelmed by the angel’s announcement, the shepherds

KEEPERS of the FLOCKS

Since they lived out in the open and were unable to maintain strict obedience to the law, shepherds generally were considered to be ceremonially unclean. As a result, they were despised by religious legalists and were typically excluded from temple worship.

Custom did not allow shepherds to serve as witnesses in legal cases, possibly because they were considered unscrupulous characters who often took things that belonged to others. How ironic that God invited these despised men to be witnesses to the greatest event of history (see Luke 2:17)!



This area near Bethlehem is known as “Shepherd’s Field.”

dropped everything and hurried to see what they had heard about. They found the baby just as they had been told. Afterward, they could not contain their enthusiasm. They stopped passersby and told people loitering nearby about the events that had brought them to find the Christ.

Ask Yourself . . . When was the last time I was so excited about something God was doing in my life that I just had to tell somebody?

When we come face-to-face with things God has done, we too will have to tell others. Unfortunately, the familiarity of the Christmas story sometimes dilutes the astonishment of it all. Unless we are careful, we can lose the wonder: *Yes, it is great. But I've heard it all before.*

The shepherds returned to their fields, but they were changed. How could they help but praise and glorify God for what they had seen?

Meanwhile, Mary did not completely comprehend the events that were happening around her. She “treasured . . . and pondered” them in her heart (v. 19). She would never forget what happened the night Jesus was born.

Like Mary, we do not have to understand everything God is doing before we can appreciate His work in our lives. We can ponder God’s ways and at the same time treasure what He is doing.

Ask Yourself . . . What is God doing in my life that I don't fully understand? What might I gain by slowing down enough to ponder it?



The MESSIAH The CHRIST The 'ANOINTED ONE'

Christ is a word borrowed from Greek. It means “Anointed One,” signifying divine commissioning for a specific task. In Old Testament times, kings and priests were anointed with oil as a sign of their divine appointment.

The Hebrew word for the Anointed One is translated *Messiah*. It was used of the promised one who would deliver Israel from oppression. Most Jews thought He would be a political leader. They did not consider that His mission might be to free them from sin.

d Jesus Is Taken to the Temple (2:21–40)

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. —Luke 2:22

Joseph and Mary carefully followed the law. They had Jesus circumcised when He was eight days old (v. 21; see Lev. 12:3).

Jesus, who would usher in the new covenant, fulfilled all the requirements of the old covenant.

It was customary for Jewish boys to be named when they were circumcised. Mary and Joseph used the name the angel had given (Luke 1:31). “Jesus” is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Joshua*; it means “the Lord saves.”

The law also required purification for Mary and her baby (2:22). All Jewish mothers were ceremonially unclean for seven days following the birth of a son. Then they had to wait an additional thirty-three days before they could offer a temple sacrifice for purification (see Lev. 12:1–3).

Again we see Jesus’ link with the poor. His parents brought an offering people gave when they couldn’t afford the traditional lamb (Luke 2:24; see Lev. 12:6–8).

Then they consecrated Jesus as their firstborn son (Luke 2:23; see Ex. 13:2, 12). This ceremony reminded Jews that each child was a gift from God. But in this special case Jesus was a gift from God to the whole world.

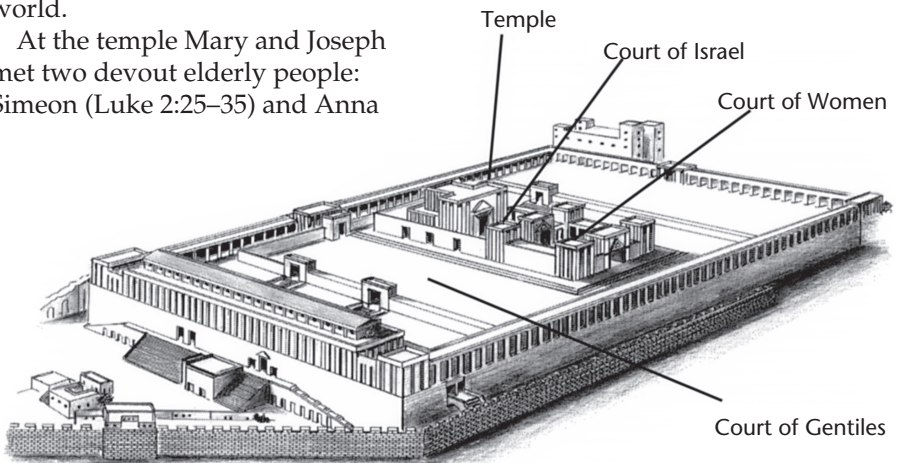
At the temple Mary and Joseph met two devout elderly people: Simeon (Luke 2:25–35) and Anna

(vv. 36–38).

The Holy Spirit prompted Simeon to go to the temple at the same time Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were there. Luke said Simeon had been waiting “for the consolation of Israel” (2:25)—an expression rabbis of that time used to speak of their hope for the coming Messiah.

The Holy Spirit had told Simeon that he would live to see the Messiah. When Simeon saw Jesus, he knew his prayers (2:25–35) and Anna’s prayers (vv. 36–38) had been answered. He held the baby and blessed Him, saying He would be God’s salvation.

Simeon’s view of the Messiah had more dimensions than what others hoped for. Most thought of the Messiah as a political leader who would set the Jewish nation free. Simeon grasped the Messiah’s spiritual nature. Those who rejected Him would fall in judgment; those who accepted Him would be exalted (v. 34). Either way, no one would be



able to remain neutral about Him.

It's still the same today. We must have an opinion about Jesus. Either we are for Him or we are against Him. Either we surrender our lives to Him or we are at war with Him.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever tried to remain neutral about Jesus? What would I do differently if I could do it over again?

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus also met a prophetess named Anna in the temple. She was either eighty-four years old or she had been a widow for eighty-four years—the text is not clear (2:37). She may have lodged in one of the rooms of the temple complex, or at least she spent most of her waking hours at the temple. She was truly pious, and no doubt like Simeon, she had longed to see the Messiah. When she finally did see Jesus, she praised God and told other devout people about Him.

The stories of Simeon and Anna provide a valuable reminder that God rewards the faithful. He preserved the lives of that man and woman until they saw the Lord. Similarly, God's plan includes showing us kindnesses along the way of our lives.

After Mary and Joseph had Jesus

circumcised and presented Him at the temple, they returned to their home in Nazareth of Galilee (v. 39). Although Luke did not say so, this move did not occur until after the family had lived for a while in Egypt (Matt. 2:13–23). In Nazareth Jesus grew and was filled with God's wisdom (Luke 2:40).

Luke 2:41–52 in Brief

The temple figures in the only other biblical story we have from Jesus' early years. Mary and Joseph had taken Jesus with them to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover, one of the three most important festivals in the Jewish calendar. When the Feast was over, the caravan headed for Nazareth without Jesus. (Possibly Joseph—at the back of the caravan—thought Jesus was with Mary, while she—at the front—thought Jesus was with Joseph.) After discovering Jesus was not in the caravan, Joseph and Mary tracked Jesus down at the temple, which He said was the natural place for Him to be.

Jesus, an obedient son, returned with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth, where He finished growing up.

2

Jesus Is Prepared for Ministry

Luke 3:1–4:13

IN POWER

at the Start of
John the Baptist's
Ministry

Tiberius Caesar

Roman Emperor, A.D. 14–37*

Pontius Pilate

Governor of Judea, A.D. 26–36

Herod Antipas

Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea
4 B.C.–A.D. 39

Herod Philip

Tetrarch of Iturea, 4 B.C.–A.D. 34

Lysanias

Tetrarch of Abilene†

Annas

Jewish High Priest, A.D. 6–15‡

Caiaphas

Jewish High Priest, A.D. 18–36

* Tiberius had reigned with his father for two or three years before A.D. 14. Thus when Luke mentioned the fifteenth year of Tiberius's reign (Luke 3:1), he may have been referring to A.D. 26 or 27.

† Ancient inscriptions confirm that Lysanias governed Abilene in the first century A.D.

‡ While Annas was removed from office by the Romans long before John the Baptist's ministry began, many Jews still considered him the legitimate high priest, rather than his son-in-law Caiaphas.

a

John Preaches Repentance (3:1–14)

The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. —Luke 3:2–3

For about four hundred years there had been no true prophet in Palestine. Many Jews must have begun to wonder if God had abandoned them. But then all that changed: "The word of God came to John son of Zechariah" (v. 2). Luke carefully set the beginning of John's ministry in its historical context by listing a series of officials in power at that time (vv. 1–2).

The principal scene of John's prophetic ministry was not Jerusalem or any other city. Instead, he traveled through the rural areas of the Jordan River Valley, preaching "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (v. 3).

John's Baptism in Context

It is not possible to determine with certainty when the practice of baptism began. Baptizing Gentile converts to Judaism (called “proselytes”) occurred even before John’s time. Also, many Old Testament passages refer to ceremonial washings (Ex. 29:4; Lev. 14:8). Several prophets used the washing image to speak of inner cleansing (Isa. 1:16; Jer. 4:14; Ezek. 36:25; Zech. 13:1).

What made John’s baptism unique was that he called candidates for baptism to repent and be cleansed spiritually. His baptism was not just for the ceremonially unclean or for Gentiles. His baptism of repentance was for everyone who repented.



Luke quoted words of the prophet Isaiah to describe what John’s ministry was all about (vv. 4–6; compare Isa. 40:3–5; 52:10). John was like a herald who would go out ahead of a king or conqueror to tell the people along the route to improve the road before the great person traveled on it. On such occasions the people would fill in potholes and level off bumps; they would construct shortcuts to take the place of twisting and turning parts of the road.

In other words, John was helping the people of his day get ready for Jesus. Within a short time after John began his ministry, Jesus would begin *His* ministry. The people needed to know that God was sending them the Messiah and that they would receive either salvation or judgment from His hands. John attuned the people to their spiritual need and built up an expectancy for the Messiah, who could meet their need.

Ask Yourself . . . How can I make my unbelieving friends see their need for Jesus—and do it in a helpful way?

Great crowds flocked to John. Verses 7–9 contain part of a sermon John preached to the crowds.

Essentially, John's message was one of stern warning. The people had come to him for baptism, thinking that by doing so they would escape God's wrath. However, as did so many prophets before him, John confronted the people with their sin. He called them a "brood of vipers" (hypocrites) because they had not yet sincerely repented. He warned them against thinking that being descendants of Abraham was enough to save them. The Jewish nation at that time was like a barren fruit tree that would soon be cut down and burned unless it began to bear the fruit of repentance.

John's listeners tended to believe that their descent from Abraham guaranteed that God would spare them His wrath. Similarly, people today who come from Christian homes may tend to rely on their religious heritage for salvation. But salvation doesn't come to people just because their parents are believers. It doesn't come to anybody just because they go to church or say religious things or follow certain rules. Salvation comes to those who face up to their sin and trust in Christ alone for forgiveness.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I trusting in my religious heritage or in anything other than Christ's mercy for my salvation?

John's sermons were not one-way speeches; the people talked back. Verses 10 through 14 contain a series of three questions by the crowds and answers from John. Here we have a sampling of John's moral instructions, all having to do with material things.

Question and answer #1 (vv. 10–11). John told the people that those who had an extra tunic or extra food should share with those who had none. A lack of clothing and food was a serious problem for some, and John knew it could often be fixed through personal sacrifice.

Question and answer #2 (vv. 12–13). John told tax collectors to gather only the required amount of money. In that day tax collectors, working for the Romans, commonly overcharged people and pocketed the extra. But John condemned that corrupt practice.

Question and answer #3 (v. 14). John told soldiers not to use their power to abuse others for their personal gain. They were to be content with their pay.

If John's listeners would do as he instructed, they would be producing fruit in keeping with repentance (see v. 8). What kind of fruit are we producing?

It's easy to claim to repent; the proof of repentance comes when we show by our actions that we are changed. These actions might seem painful, such as by reducing the balance in our bank accounts, but the benefits of repentance far outweigh whatever hardships it may bring.

b **John Testifies to
and Baptizes Jesus
(3:15–22)**

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

—Luke 3:16

The impact John had on the people caused some to wonder if he might be the Messiah (v. 15). But John made it plain that he was insignificant compared to the one yet to come. In those days the lowliest servants generally removed

the sandals of their masters and household guests. But John didn’t feel qualified even to be the lowliest servant of the coming Messiah (v. 16).

John also pointed out the limitations of what he could do. He could administer the *symbol* of spiritual cleansing (water baptism), but he could do nothing about the *reality* of sin within. Christ, however, would cleanse hearts: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” The reference to fire may mean that Christ would burn out the sin of the repentant (thus purifying them) and would burn up (judge) people who would not repent.

John conjured up a harvest image in the minds of his hearers to show what he meant (v. 17). At that time



The Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized.

farmers carried sheaves of grain to a threshing floor, where they would drive oxen dragging a heavy sledge across the grain to loosen the kernels from the stalks. Next, they would toss the mixture into the air with a winnowing fork (pitchfork). This allowed the wind to blow the worthless chaff to one side while the heavier grain fell back to the threshing floor. They would then throw the chaff—the straw and husks—onto a fire and put the grain in storage.

To John, sin (or unrepentant sinners) was like chaff and Christ’s everlasting judgment was like “unquenchable fire.”

Ask Yourself . . . How has Christ winnowed the chaff of sin from my life?

For all his fiery words, John’s message contained good news—a message of hope in the coming Messiah (v. 18). John knew that if there were to be conversions, there would first have to be conviction. Repentance would pave the way for forgiveness.

John would not compromise his stand against sin even if it meant preaching against those in power. So John denounced Herod Antipas, the tetrarch (governor) of Galilee and Perea, for his evil ways (v. 19). Herod’s evil ways included divorcing his wife to marry his brother’s wife who also happened to be his niece. Herod did not repent but rather put John in prison (v. 20).

Before John’s imprisonment happened, however, Jesus came to John for baptism (vv. 21–22). We

might naturally wonder why. After all, Jesus was sinless and didn’t need a spiritual cleansing, which baptism symbolized. The solution to the problem is that by being baptized, Jesus identified with those He had come to save. For Jesus, baptism symbolized not cleansing from sin but the way in which He took the sinner’s place.

While Jesus was praying at His baptism, the Holy Spirit visibly came upon Him like a dove (vv. 21–22). Also, the Father audibly expressed His approval of Jesus. We can only imagine what the people standing nearby thought of all this. But for Jesus these signs must have brought much encouragement for His upcoming ministry.

He would need it.

Ask Yourself . . . Is the Father able to truthfully say He is well pleased with me?

Luke 3:23–38 in Brief

In this portion of the Gospel, Luke mentioned that Jesus began His ministry when He was about thirty. Thirty was the age when Levites began their service and when a man was considered mature.

Luke also presented a genealogy beginning with Joseph and stretching backward in time to Adam and God. This genealogy shows, among other things, that Jesus was legally a descendant of David and thus could fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of a ruler in the line of David.

C Jesus Overcomes Temptation (4:1–13)

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. —Luke 4:1–2

We might think that once we have repented, been cleansed within, and have received the Holy Spirit, temptation will no longer be a problem for us. The reality, however, is almost the opposite. Temptations seem to multiply when we take a stand for Christ.

Perhaps Christians shouldn't be surprised about our temptations, since Jesus Himself faced tremendous temptations after His baptism. He "was led by the Spirit" into the desert, where He was tempted for forty days (v. 1).

Just as the Spirit led Jesus into the path of temptation, God permits temptations to come into our lives. He knows our faith can become stronger and more mature through the process of testing. At the same time, God puts a limit on how much we can be tempted. He also provides us with the spiritual resources to make it possible for us to overcome our temptations (see 1 Cor. 10:13).

Ask Yourself . . . What temptations has God allowed me to experience? How have testings and temptations affected me?

Probably Satan tempted Jesus throughout the forty-day period that He was in the desert. But Luke tells us of only three temptations.

As we study the temptations, we should note that Jesus responded to each of them with Scripture. This shows us that a sound knowledge of God's Word can be one of our best defenses against temptation.

First temptation (Luke 4:3–4).

Satan's first temptation seemed innocent enough: he suggested that Jesus turn stones into bread. Jesus fasted while in the desert, so of course He was hungry. The round stones scattered about may even have begun to look like loaves of bread to Him. Satan's suggestion must have been attractive.

Yet Jesus saw that Satan's suggestion wasn't as innocent as it sounded. There's nothing sinful about a hungry person getting something to eat; but Satan was tempting Jesus to misuse His power, which was meant to help Him fulfill His mission, not to make His life easy.

Jesus responded to the first temptation by recalling Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man shall not live on bread alone" (Luke 4:4). Jesus did not need to turn the stones to bread; rather, He trusted in His Father's care.

Satan may tempt us with material things, as he tempted Jesus. He may whisper in our ears something like this: "Since you're a child of God, you deserve the best of everything. So go for it." Satan may try to make us think it's okay to do whatever

it takes to get a better job, a bigger house, a faster car.

Ask Yourself . . . How vulnerable am I to temptations involving material things?

Second temptation (vv. 5–8). Satan next tempted Jesus by showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and offering to give them to Him. The catch was that Jesus would have to worship Satan.

People have bowed down to Satan for much less than Jesus was offered, but Jesus resisted this temptation as well. In the Father's plan Jesus was to receive the glory and authority due Him by experiencing suffering and becoming our sacrifice for sin. Satan was tempting Jesus to wear the crown without first bearing the cross. To us it would have been appealing—who wants a cross? But

Jesus resisted Satan.

Jesus answered the second temptation with another quotation from Scripture: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only" (v. 8; compare Deut. 10:20). Jesus was determined to be true to the Father.

Ask Yourself . . . Does the possibility of gaining power or prestige ever draw me into doing what I know is wrong?

Third temptation (vv. 9–12). For the third temptation, Satan suggested an easy way for Jesus to attract people's attention—by throwing Himself down from the highest point of the temple and being rescued by angels. Satan even quoted Scripture (vv. 10–11; compare Ps. 91:11–12) to try to justify his suggestion.

Jesus again set the example for us. The Lord knew that it would be wrong to expect God to rescue

This mountain in the Judean wilderness is traditionally considered the site of Jesus' temptation. Today, monastery buildings cling to the mountainside.



Him if He did something so foolish. It would be wrong to try to impress people with His position when God wanted Him to win them with words of truth and acts of mercy. Satan had misapplied the scriptural quote.

The passage Jesus used in answering Satan this time was “Do not put the Lord your God to the test” (Luke 4:12; see Deut. 6:16). Jesus would not presume upon God, despite His privileged position.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever taken a foolish risk simply because I believed that God would protect me?

Jesus won this battle over temptation, but Satan didn’t surrender (Luke 4:13). He only withdrew “until an opportune time.” Jesus faced temptation until the end of His earthly life.

We can never assume that because we have overcome a temptation we can coast spiritually. Satan will be watching for an opportunity to catch us off guard. But whenever we find ourselves facing temptation, we can draw strength from Jesus, “who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Heb. 4:15).

3

Jesus Begins Ministering in Galilee

Luke 4:14–6:11

a Jesus Is Rejected at Nazareth (4:14–30)

“Truly I tell you,” [Jesus] continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown.”

—Luke 4:24

Sometime after His baptism and victory over temptation, Jesus returned to Galilee. Luke didn’t provide details about what Jesus did in Galilee, but we know He

ministered in the power of the Spirit and taught in the synagogues. People who saw and heard Him spread the news of what He was doing.

Eventually Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth, and according to His custom, He went to the synagogue on the sabbath. His reputation had mushroomed, and the locals turned out to hear the homegrown boy who had made good. But no doubt many were skeptical. They came doubting He could be as good as the stories painted Him to be.

When skepticism prevents us from seeing God at work, it has undermined the place of faith in our lives. Such a mind-set will shut God out. We should evaluate alleged works of God, but we should also nurture faith to see God’s hand at work.

As a visiting rabbi and hometown celebrity, Jesus was invited to be the guest speaker. At the appropriate time



Present-day Nazareth

Synagogue Worship in the Time of Jesus

Wherever ten Jewish families lived, they formed a synagogue (literally “congregation” or “assembly”). Sacrifices could be made only at the temple, but from the time of the exile, teaching of the law and worship took place in synagogues situated wherever Jews had been scattered throughout the world.

After a recitation of the Shema (“Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One”), prayers, Scripture readings and teaching followed. Since there was no professional clergy (rabbis held secular trades to earn their living), the synagogue leader could invite anyone to teach.

Typically, seven members of the congregation would stand to read Scripture. The designated teacher would then sit down to teach.

in the service He was handed the scroll of Isaiah, which He unrolled and from which He read in Hebrew. Presumably, He then translated the passages into Aramaic, which was the common language of the people.

Jesus read Isaiah 61:1–2—a messianic prophecy. The passage predicted that the era of the Messiah would be a time of liberation and

change. Then Jesus gave the scroll back to the attendant and sat down to teach.

Most Jews hoped for a powerful leader to arise and deliver them from the Romans, who dominated them. So when Jesus announced that this messianic prophecy was now being fulfilled, He had the worshipers’ full attention.

Some were impressed. But others were not so sure. Amazed by Jesus’ message, they began to talk among themselves. “What does He know? Isn’t He Joseph’s son?” (see v. 22).

Jesus knew He had a skeptical audience on His hands. But He met their doubts head-on. He acknowledged that they would want Him to prove Himself, to see dramatic evidence of His power. But because they couldn’t imagine God’s raising up one of their own to be a prophet, He would not show them God’s power (see Matt. 13:58). Doubt can limit what God does in people’s lives.

Ask Yourself . . . What doubts do I have? What have I seen of God’s power that should cast out all doubt?

Jesus drove His point home, reminding the skeptical worshipers that because God’s chosen people doubted, they had missed blessings Gentiles then received. Jesus cited an instance in the time of Elijah and another in the time of Elisha (see 1 Kings 17:8–16; 2 Kings 5:1–14).

Hearing about the widow of Zarephath and the leper from Syria infuriated Jesus’ hearers. It was bad enough for Jesus to say He was the

This hill near Nazareth may have been the place where an unsuccessful attempt was made on Jesus' life.

fulfillment of messianic prophecy. Now He was saying that they were unworthy of God's blessings!

The people surged toward Jesus. They pushed and shoved, moving Him toward a bluff at the edge of town, intending to toss Him over the side.

But He slipped away from the mob and escaped. Luke doesn't say this escape was a miracle, but it probably was.

By rejecting Jesus, the Nazarenes allowed the blessings of God to slip away from them. They showed they were unworthy by refusing to listen. In obstinate pride they thought they knew better than Jesus.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I heed Jesus' teachings even when they surprise and startle me?

Luke 4:31–44 in Brief

Luke described several incidents from the early ministry of Jesus in Galilee. Demons yielded to His authority and the sick were healed by His touch.

While such sensational events caused His fame to spread, He refused to limit Himself to the desires of the people. Preaching the "good news of the kingdom of God" (v. 43), He continued to travel throughout Galilee.



b Jesus Calls His First Disciples (5:1–11)

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

—Luke 5:10–11

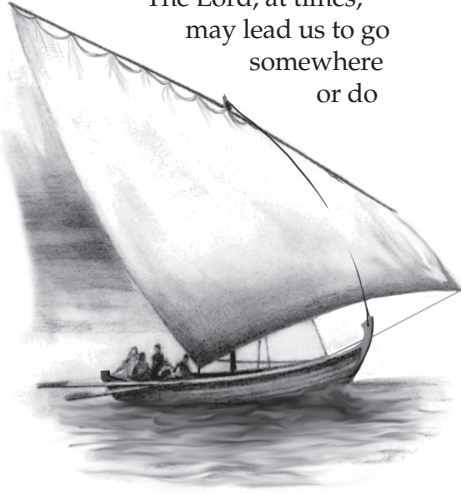
Wherever He went, Jesus attracted attention. But even admiring crowds could present problems. On one occasion the throng jostled close to Jesus while He taught by the Lake of Gennesaret, also known as the Sea of Galilee. He saw two boats along the shore and asked if He could use one of them to preach from.

After teaching, Jesus told Simon (Peter) to go out into deeper water and put down his nets to catch fish.

Peter doubted there was much use in trying. He and his companions had fished all the previous night and

had nothing to show for their efforts. Furthermore, Peter knew nights were better for fishing than days; he knew they could catch fish more easily in shallow water than in deep. Finally, they had just cleaned their nets, stretching them out to dry so they wouldn't rot.

The Lord, at times,
may lead us to go
somewhere
or do



something that does not make sense to us. Logic often fails to see the supernatural dimension. God does not always ask us to understand what He wants us to do, however. He simply asks us to obey.

Ask Yourself . . . When Jesus tells me to do something, do I depend more on logic or on faith? Are logic and faith exclusive? How can I achieve a proper balance between the two?

Peter was skeptical, but not like the skeptics in Nazareth. He had faith enough to obey. "Because you say so," he told Jesus, "I will let down the nets" (v. 5). Most likely this was not

the first time Peter had met Jesus or seen His miracles (see John 1:40–42; 2:11). In any event, out of respect for Jesus, he went against common sense and his own fishing expertise, and let down his nets.

The record catch of fish defied all the odds. It convinced Peter that Jesus had an incredible measure of God's power.

Suddenly he felt unworthy even to be with Jesus. "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" he said (Luke 5:8).

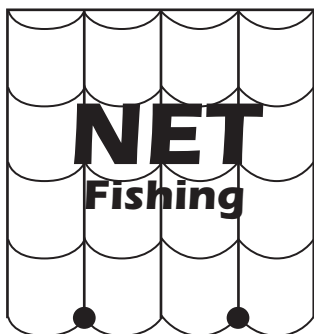
Verse 9 more literally says that astonishment seized him. Peter's astonishment, however, was a prelude to his humble acceptance of Jesus. He and his fellow fishermen, James and John, became full-time followers of Jesus.

Peter's simple act of obedience proved to be a turning point in his life. He was transformed from one who caught fish to one who caught people.

Luke 5:12–32 in Brief

Jesus presumably desired to heal every sick person He encountered, but He was concerned about causing too much commotion too soon. So after healing a man afflicted with leprosy, Jesus charged the healed leper to tell no one about the miracle. But the news got out anyway (vv. 12–16).

As Jesus' fame grew, so did the crowds. His humanity required that He get away on occasion to pray to His Father in heaven. But His



One form of fishing practiced at the Sea of Galilee involved using a net about eight feet wide and perhaps hundreds of feet long. Cork floats on one side and weights on the other caused the net to hang in the water like a fence. The fishermen played out the net, encircling an area. Then they pulled in the lower side of the net to form a huge bag. Finally, they hauled the net with its fish to the surface.

divinity was also revealed. He healed a paralytic man to show He had power to forgive sins (vv. 17–26).

When Jesus called Levi (also known as Matthew) to be His disciple, He showed He was more concerned about needy people than about His reputation with the religious elite (vv. 27–32).

C Jesus Is Questioned about Fasting (5:33–39)

They said to [Jesus], “John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.”

—Luke 5:33

The crowds grew larger as Jesus ministered throughout Galilee. But His critics also multiplied. One day some of them approached Him, asking why His disciples did not fast like the disciples of John and of the Pharisees.

We don’t know much about the religious practices of John’s disciples. But the Pharisees, we know, practiced an intricate system of religious activity. They fasted every Monday and Thursday (although they could eat before sunrise and after sunset on those days). Sometimes they whitened their faces so that God and the people could see how much discomfort their piety was causing them.

Even today some people take a dim view of joyful religion. They think it’s impossible to be serious about God without having long faces and sour dispositions. They act as if religion needs to be uncomfortable to do any good.

Jesus was often serious, but He also enjoyed life. One criticism leveled against Him was that He ate like a glutton and drank like a

drunkard (7:34). He wasn't really guilty of these excesses, but His joyful lifestyle led accusers to make such charges. Jesus knew His Father wanted people to feast as well as fast.

Jesus did not discredit fasting itself. What He questioned was its use to gain points with others. Fasting for religious show is worthless (see Matt. 6:16–18).

In responding to His critics, Jesus compared the present situation to a wedding with feasting and celebrating. His critics probably scowled at the thought.

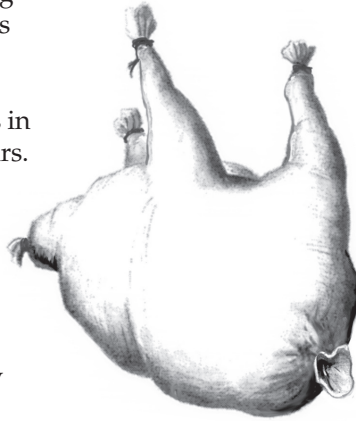
First-century weddings in Palestine were not like ours. In that culture a new couple did not go on a honeymoon; instead, they stayed home and entertained guests. For one week they were treated like royalty, sometimes even wearing crowns. Their every wish was catered to. Their guests were treated like guests of a king and queen, eating and drinking sumptuously.

Jesus said He was like a bridegroom. As long as the bridegroom was still present, there was cause for celebration. Later, He said, after the bridegroom was gone, the festival would end. Then fasting would be appropriate.

Luke 5:35 contains a veiled prediction of Jesus' death and departure, but it is not likely that anyone who heard Jesus' words understood this deeper meaning.

Jesus used parables to explain complex spiritual truths in terms the common people could understand. Now He told two parables about the incompatibility of old and new things.

A person who patches clothes, Jesus said, never takes a piece of new cloth to patch an old garment. A new cloth will shrink but the old



In Jesus' day wine and other fluids were often kept in animal skins, especially goatskins. Jesus illustrated the incompatibility of legalistic religion with Christian faith by saying no one would pour new wine into an old wineskin (Luke 5:37).

cloth won't; thus the patch will pull away from the garment. Using new cloth to patch an old garment wouldn't be good for either the new cloth or the old. Jesus meant that the prevailing Jewish legalism was not compatible with His new and better way. For instance, fasting to earn favor with God was not consistent with salvation by faith.

Next, Jesus said no one would pour new wine into old wineskins. If they did, the wine would ferment and expand, eventually bursting the brittle old wineskin. That would ruin both wine and wineskin. Again, the point is that legalism was not compatible with Christian faith.

We should not conclude that Jesus'

two parables were for His immediate hearers only. We too may tend to stick to religious traditions when those traditions are contrary to a life of faith. So it's important that we evaluate where our true allegiance lies—with our traditions or with Christ. We should stop to think about whether God is at work in the religious things we do.

Not that evaluation and change are easy. Luke included the comment that “no one after drinking old wine wants the new” (v. 39). Jesus meant that most people tend to prefer what they are familiar with. We usually find it difficult to make changes.

Ask Yourself . . . How do I respond to something that is new and innovative?

d Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath (6:1–11)

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. —Luke 6:7

The jealous Jewish leaders continued to harass Jesus, looking for occasions to find fault. But since He had a high regard for God's law, they had to turn to their own legalistic interpretations for ammunition.

The law said the sabbath was to be kept holy, reserved for God. It was a day of rest (Ex. 20:8–11; 31:14–17). The law did not, however,

offer a precise definition of work. So the rabbis did. In the process they covered the simple command with layer upon layer of man-made regulations.

One sabbath, Jesus' disciples were snacking on grain from a field. It was customary for farmers to leave the edges of their fields for the poor and passersby (see Deut. 23:25). The Pharisees weren't upset because the disciples took grain. But they were scandalized to see them harvesting and preparing food on the sabbath.

Answering the Pharisees' complaint, Jesus reminded them of the time David ate consecrated bread (1 Sam. 21:1–6). Though David technically had violated the law by eating bread that was to be eaten only by the priests, he had not violated the spirit of the law. His emergency need allowed him to eat bread intended only for the priests.

The teachers of the law could not understand that human need takes precedence over ritual law. Nor could they see that the disciples, like David, were in unusual circumstances. They were with the “Lord of the Sabbath” (Luke 6:5).

It's easy to fall into the Pharisees' trap. Rules and regulations give us a sense of order, organizing and simplifying our lives. When something or someone disrupts our routine or interrupts our schedule, it's not hard to choose the comfortable thing and make excuses.

“I'd like to help that guy with the flat tire, but I can't be late for my Sunday school class”; “I know that

our missionary has an urgent financial need, but that money is for me to go on the retreat.”

Ask Yourself . . . Does my fear of leaving my comfort zone ever prevent me from helping someone with a need?

On another sabbath Jesus presented a direct challenge to the Pharisees and teachers of the law over the sabbath regulations. They believed that healing someone (except in an emergency) on the sabbath was work and therefore was unlawful. So Jesus told a man with a shriveled right hand (not an emergency case) to stand up in the synagogue. “Which is lawful on the Sabbath,” He asked, “to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?” (v. 9).

He looked around at His adversaries, waiting for an answer, but none came. Mark told us that

Jesus “looked around at them in anger . . . deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts” (Mark 3:5). They were more concerned about superficial religion than about people in need. They were more concerned about procedures than about God’s will. Their religion turned everything upside down.

Jesus told the man to stretch out his hand, and it was healed. The Pharisees were too angry to marvel at the miracle or rejoice that the man was restored. Muttering among themselves, they tried to figure out what they could do about Jesus.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever been so upset by violations of my religious traditions that I failed to see what Jesus was doing?

Jesus came to dismantle superficial religion and to give life to all who receive Him.

Traditions: Adding to the Law

The rabbis added their own ideas and interpretations to “clarify” the written law. For example, Moses had told the people not to gather manna on the sabbath (Ex. 16:29). The rabbis said that meant nobody could go more than two thousand cubits (about three thousand feet) from their home on the sabbath.

The rabbis not only added to the law but they also built in loopholes. For example, they revised their sabbath restriction. If somebody placed two meals at a distance of two thousand cubits from their home the day before the sabbath, they could define that site as their dwelling. So they could walk that far on the sabbath—and then go another two thousand cubits beyond!

Over time, the Pharisees and some other Jews thought these man-made interpretations (called the oral law) had as much force and authority as the written law. In contrast, Jesus called them—with some scornful contempt—“traditions” (Mark 7:9).

4

Jesus Tells How to Live

Luke 6:12–49

Luke 6:12–19 in Brief

Jesus selected twelve of His followers for special assignment as apostles. Some people believe the reason He chose twelve—the same number as the Israelite tribes—was to indicate that He was creating a new people of God. Jesus went with the apostles to a plain, where He healed many who flocked to Him from all around. There He also preached a magnificent sermon.

a Blessings and Woes (6:20–26)

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. . . . But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. —Luke 6:20, 24

Jesus began His sermon with two lists—the first a list of blessings and the second a list of woes. These lists match up item for item, and together they overturned widely accepted beliefs among Jews in Jesus' day.

Jesus told the poor that they would

receive the kingdom of God (v. 20). But He told the rich they had already received their comfort (v. 24).

He assured the hungry that they would be satisfied (v. 21a). But He warned the well fed that they would go hungry (v. 25a).

He encouraged weeping people by saying they would laugh (v. 21b). But He told those who were laughing that they would mourn and weep (v. 25b).

He told those who were hated, excluded, insulted, and rejected for His sake (v. 22)—in other words, those who were treated just as the prophets had been treated (v. 23)—that they could be happy because they would have a great reward in heaven. But He warned those who were well spoken of (v. 26).

In Jesus' day wealth and social success were considered signs of God's favor, while poverty and hardship were considered signs of divine disfavor. However, too often wealth and social success were achieved by exploiting others. God's favor had nothing to do with it.

Probably the crowd listening to Jesus' sermon was made up largely of people from the lower classes. If so, perhaps Jesus wanted to assure

His hearers that God saw their faith and would reward them and that God would pull their oppressors down from high places.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I using my material resources and social influence in ways that please God?

We should note that Jesus used the future tense (“you will go hungry,” “you will mourn and weep”) when He spoke about woes. Evidently, He was referring to the punishment people would receive later in life, or if not that, then certainly after their death.

However, Jesus used the present tense (“yours is the kingdom of God”) once when He spoke about blessings. He also advised people to rejoice in anticipation of their heavenly reward. These facts suggest that people already enjoyed some of the blessedness He was speaking about—because of their salvation through faith in Him.

b Love for Enemies (6:27–36)

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. —Luke 6:27–28

Many people in Jesus’ day, just like many in ours, simply assumed that they should hate their enemies and love their friends. But Jesus had a startling command for His

hearers. They were not to hate their enemies. They were not even to be neutral toward their enemies. They were to love their enemies.

And along with that, they were to do good to those who hated them, bless those who cursed them, and pray for those who mistreated them (vv. 27–28). The principle is that Christ’s followers should return good for evil.

Jesus illustrated His principle with four examples of how people should return good for evil (vv. 29–30). People who have been struck on the cheek should expose their other cheek. People whose cloak has been taken should offer their tunic. People who are asked to give should give. People whose property is taken should refrain from seeking to recover it.

Christians differ over how literally to interpret Jesus’ words in these four illustrations. Some say that Jesus really meant for His followers to offer no resistance to evil. Others say that Jesus meant for His followers to have an attitude of love rather than of revenge, without implying that we can never take measures for self-protection.

No matter how literally one takes Jesus’ words in verses 29 and 30, all must agree that they are summed up by what has become known as the Golden Rule: “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (v. 31). We all like others to do good things for us; therefore, if we follow the Golden Rule, we will do good things for others.

The world can sometimes seem

like a cold place, everybody trying to get others to serve them. What a wonderful place the world would be if each person were bent on serving others! The world will never entirely be like that. But at least our churches can be places where Jesus' ideal of mutual service is lived out.

Ask Yourself . . . What would I like others to do for me? How can I do those things for others ?

Some of Jesus' hearers must have been feeling satisfied with themselves for loving some people—namely, people from whom they expected to get something in return. But Jesus wanted to show His hearers that they should not be satisfied with themselves too easily when it comes to loving.

Love that has a selfish motive is not worthy of credit. Selfish motives are involved in loving those who love you, doing good to those who



According to Luke 6:29 Jesus told His followers that if someone were to take their "coat," or outer garment (see figure at left), they were also to let that person take their "shirt," or undergarment (see figure at right).



do good to you, and lending to those who will repay (vv. 32–34). Jesus pointed out that even “sinners” do such things. “Sinners” was the name given to Gentiles as well as to Jews who did not obey the laws. Thus Jesus was putting religious people who thought God was pleased with them on a level with the very people they looked down on.

Rather than selfish love, Jesus promoted unselfish love (v. 35). The irony here is that when Christ’s followers show love unselfishly, without the motive of getting something in return, they in fact do get something in return: “Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High.”

How does God treat His enemies? He shows them mercy! His mercy is our model as we try to love our enemies.

Ask Yourself . . . How merciful am I to others?

C Generosity and Teachers (6:37–40)

Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit?

—Luke 6:39

Verses 37–38. This brief passage begins with two *don'ts* (don't judge, don't condemn) and two *dos* (forgive, give), along with promised results for those who obey these four *dos* and *don'ts*.

The words translated “judge” and “condemn” have essentially the

same meaning, although they have slightly different shades of meaning. Jesus was talking about people concluding (and probably declaring) that others have done wrong.

Likely, Jesus had in mind the Pharisees of His day, who looked down on all who did not obey the religious laws and customs as they did. Jesus did not want His followers to be like the Pharisees.

But did Jesus mean that His followers should *never* judge or condemn others for wrongdoing? Opinions differ. For example, some say that Christians may judge or condemn others as long as we are not unjust or unmerciful or hypocritical in doing so. To take another example, some say that Christians should never judge or condemn unbelievers, but in some cases we may evaluate or confront one another (see 1 Cor. 5:12–13).

Jesus promised His hearers that if they did not judge or condemn, they would not be judged or condemned in return. Probably Jesus was referring to being judged and condemned by God. But He may also have been referring to being judged and condemned by people.

After the two *don'ts* of judgment and condemnation comes the first *do*: forgive. Jesus did not want His followers to hold grudges against people who have done us harm.

He promised that those who grant forgiveness will receive forgiveness. Again, it's not clear whether this benefit comes from God only or from people as well.

The second *do* is “give” (Luke 6:38).



The Horns of Hattin rise above the plain where Jesus could have delivered His sermon.

Jesus' word is wide enough to include all sorts of giving, including the giving of goods, money, and time. He did not want His followers to be stingy but rather to give what they can to those who have need.

Jesus promised that those who give will receive—once again, from God and perhaps from others.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I refrain from judging and condemning others? Do I readily forgive and give to others?

Jesus elaborated on the result that comes from giving to others. And to do this He used imagery drawn from the Palestinian grain trade. In those days shoppers sometimes folded the front of their outer garment over their belt to form a large pocket or pouch to hold the grain they

bought. A grain seller could cheat a customer by not packing the grain tightly. But Jesus said His followers who gave generously would receive generously—"a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over."

Finally, Jesus derived a principle: "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Give a little, get a little. Give a lot, get a lot.

Ask Yourself . . . What measure do I use?

Jesus' principle applies not only to giving. It also applies to judging, to condemning, to forgiving, and to many other behaviors. To quote a proverb, we reap what we sow.

We may find it tempting to judge and to condemn. We may find it tough to forgive and to give. But it's a powerful incentive to know

that the better we treat people, the better we ourselves will be treated.

Verses 39–40. The next passage does not come with its own built-in explanation. But the meaning is relatively clear. Jesus was warning His followers to pick their spiritual teacher carefully, and He was encouraging them with a vision of what they could achieve if they picked their teacher well.

The passage begins with two rhetorical questions, the first expecting the answer no and the second expecting the answer yes. A blind man cannot lead a blind man. If they try that, both will eventually stumble into a hole.

The “blind” men Jesus probably had uppermost in His mind were the Pharisees. These people claimed to have spiritual truth for the people, but the Pharisees’ disciples soon found themselves mired in legalistic religion.

But while Jesus was mainly thinking of the Pharisees, His words are true of all false teachers. These teachers can’t lead their followers to a righteousness they themselves do not have. We must choose carefully who we will follow.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever let myself be led by a spiritually blind person?

If the people of first-century A.D. Palestine did not follow the Pharisees or other false teachers, who should they follow? Jesus, of course. He was not blind but seeing. And He gives spiritual sight to all who submit to His teaching.

To encourage the people with

the idea that they could become righteous through following Him, Jesus referred to education. In His day, rabbis taught children such subjects as reading, writing, and especially the Hebrew Scriptures. These children remained subordinate to the rabbi, but when they completed the course of instruction, their knowledge was similar to his.

Those who follow Jesus will never be greater than, nor even as great as, Jesus. But we may become like Him in the sense that we may become truly righteous through following Him. That’s a far cry from what would happen to us if we were to follow false teachers.

Ask Yourself . . . How much am I, a student, like Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher?

d Logs, Trees, and Houses (6:41–49)

Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I say?

—Luke 6:46

Verses 41–42. In this part of His sermon, Jesus soundly condemned hypocrisy. He used a humorous comparison to teach that His followers should not try to correct others while we stand in need of correction ourselves.

Here again Jesus may have had the Pharisees in mind. The Pharisees were trying to tell others how to live while they themselves were living lives that deeply displeased God.

Jesus contrasted a “speck of sawdust” in one person’s eye with a “plank” in another’s. The word translated “plank” referred to a heavy piece of timber such as might be used for a roof rafter or joist. This was no small piece of wood that was sticking out of an eye!

Of course, a person should remove a plank from his or her eye before removing a speck from someone else’s eye. In the same way, we should deal with the sin in our own lives before helping others deal with their sin.

Christ’s followers are to be humble, not hypocritical.

Ask Yourself
... Am I ever too quick to concern myself with other people’s shortcomings?

Verses 43–45. From the contrast between hypocrisy and humility, Jesus turned in His sermon to the contrast between evil expression and good expression. Drawing comparisons with nature, Jesus taught that people with evil in their hearts naturally say evil things; likewise, people with good in their hearts naturally say good things. Jesus meant for His people to have and to express goodness because of their faith in Him.

Orchards and vineyards were common sights in ancient

Palestine. The people loved such fruits as figs, grapes, olives, oranges, and pomegranates.

Jesus drew a comparison from the fruit industry to make His point about expressing oneself. He reminded His hearers that good (healthy) trees never bear bad fruit and bad (unhealthy) trees never bear good fruit. Similarly, thornbushes don’t bear figs and briars don’t bear grapes. These things are impossible because they would be contrary to the laws of nature.



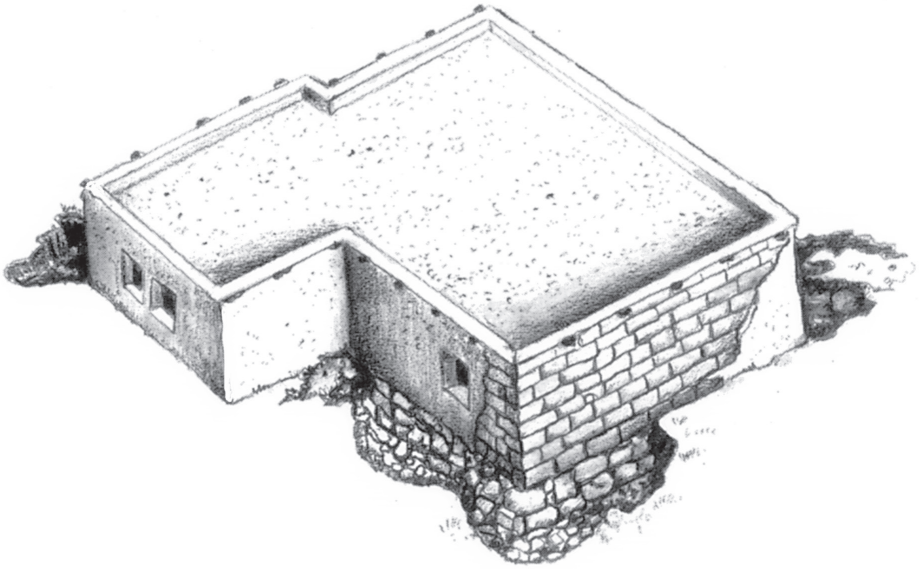
Figs

nature. Similar laws govern morality. Good people express themselves in good ways. Evil people express themselves in evil ways.

The condition of the heart determines the content of speech.

Jesus’ teaching in this passage gives us at least two practical truths. First, God must change people’s hearts before they can become truly good people. Second, speech and other behaviors are indicators of the state of a person’s heart.

Ask Yourself... What do the words coming from my mouth indicate about what’s in my heart?



Houses in Palestine were typically made of clay bricks with wooden roof beams. Foundations were of uncut stones and rubble. Jesus told a parable that compared a life based on His teachings to a house with a strong foundation.

Verses 46–49. Jesus concluded His sermon with another story—this one about two house builders. Jesus used this story to challenge His listeners to obey Him. Evidently, some people in the crowd were claiming to be His followers and yet were not doing what He told them they should do (v. 46).

First, Jesus compared a person who hears and puts into practice His words to a wise builder. This builder laid the foundation of his house on rock. Thus the house could withstand the floodwaters when they came, as they did in certain areas of Palestine during the two annual rainy seasons.

Next, Jesus compared a person who hears but does not practice His words to a foolish builder. This second builder constructed

his home without a foundation. Consequently, the house was destroyed in the flood.

We know who the two builders stand for, but what about the other elements in the story? The houses probably stand for people's lives. The floodwaters probably stand for the final judgment as well as for difficulties in life.

If we believe in Jesus and do as He said, we'll be declared not guilty at the final judgment and we'll be able to endure the blows that life throws at us. But for those who don't believe in Jesus and don't obey Him, the future looks bleak indeed.

Ask Yourself . . . How will I put Jesus' words—those in this sermon and all the rest—into practice in my life?

5

Jesus Continues His Ministry in and around Galilee

Luke 7:1–9:50

a A Centurion Believes in Jesus (7:1–10)

I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.

—Luke 7:9

Sometime after Jesus delivered the sermon that we studied last week, He entered Capernaum. This town, the home of Peter, was Jesus' Galilean headquarters.

Capernaum was the most important city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Its

significance is shown by the presence of a detachment of troops. This detachment, which was there to maintain law and order in the area, was commanded by a centurion.

The centurion at Capernaum was unable to care for a beloved servant who lay dying. But news about Jesus and His ability to heal gave the centurion hope. He believed that Jesus could heal his servant.

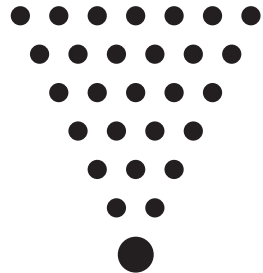
The centurion asked the elders of the Jews in Capernaum to plead his case with Jesus, probably because he didn't feel worthy to go to Jesus himself (see v. 7). The elders,

CENTURION: Leader of 100 Men

In the provinces—including Palestine—the Roman army was organized into *legions*.

A legion was made up of six thousand men. Each legion was divided into ten *cohorts*; each cohort had three *maniples*; and each maniple had two *centuries*. A century had roughly one hundred men and was commanded by a centurion.

All the centurions mentioned in the New Testament are represented in a favorable light.





Excavated ruins at Capernaum. The octagonal structure was an early Christian church, believed to have been built on the site of Peter's home. The structure with pillars was a second- or third-century synagogue, probably built on the site of an earlier synagogue sponsored by a centurion who met Jesus.

however, considered him a worthy man. They explained to Jesus that the centurion deserved help because he was a friend to the Jews and had “built our synagogue” (v. 5). This may mean the centurion had paid for the Capernaum synagogue himself. However, it seems more likely that he had used his influence to solicit Roman funds for the construction of the synagogue. Possibly the centurion had begun to embrace the Jewish religion.

Strangely, the centurion, after

first asking Jesus to come to him (v. 3) then asked Him not to come (v. 6). Evidently he expected Jesus to heal his servant from a distance. But learning that Jesus was on His way to his house, the centurion had second thoughts: “I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.”

Strict Jews would have agreed with him. They believed Jews became ceremonially unclean when they entered the home of a Gentile. The irony is that this “unclean” Gentile proved to have more faith than any of the “clean” Jews Jesus encountered (v. 9)!

As an officer in charge of others, the centurion understood how the chain of command works. He had some authority in physical realms, but he believed Jesus had power in the spiritual realm. He believed that if Jesus would “say the word” (v. 7), the chain of command would go into action and his servant would be healed.

The centurion’s grasp of this spiritual dynamic amazed Jesus. The New Testament records only two times when Jesus was amazed: Here He was amazed at the belief of a non-Jew. Another time He was amazed at the unbelief of Israelites (Mark 6:6).

Matthew’s version of this miracle fills in the concluding detail: “Then Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.’ And his servant was healed at that moment.” (Matt. 8:13).

Ask Yourself . . . What miracle do I want Jesus to perform in my life?

Luke 7:11–17 in Brief

Luke often shows Jesus' compassion for people in pain. When the Lord encountered a funeral procession at Nain in Galilee, His heart went out to a widow who had lost her only son (probably her last means of support). Jesus touched the coffin and brought the young man back to life.

b Jesus Encourages John the Baptist (7:18–35)

But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:

I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.

I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John. —Luke 7:26–28

Such miracles as the healing of the centurion's servant and the raising of a widow's son naturally became the subjects of much talk. Word reached John the Baptist (through John's disciples) even though John was in prison (Matt. 11:2).

Surprisingly, Jesus' miracles made John wonder about whether Jesus really was the Messiah. Perhaps

John wondered why Jesus was not using divine power to release him from jail. Or perhaps John wondered why Jesus was performing acts of mercy rather than of judgment, as John had predicted (Luke 3:16–17).

John sent two of his disciples to Jesus with a point-blank question: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (7:19).

John's two emissaries reached Jesus at a time when Jesus was performing many miracles of healing and exorcism and was preaching the good news. So when they carried John's question to Jesus, the Lord simply told them to tell John what they had seen. Jesus' point seems to be that since He was fulfilling prophecies of the Messiah (see Isa. 61:1–2), He must be the Messiah.

Ask Yourself . . . What evidence do I have that Jesus is the Messiah? How many people have I shared that evidence with recently?

Jesus added an additional word of encouragement for John: "Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me" (Luke 7:23). The word "stumble" translates a word that has come over into English as "scandalized." Jesus knew that many people would be scandalized by what He did or did not do, and therefore would have a hard time accepting His true identity. But He urged John not to be one of those people.

So we see that Jesus did not respond to John's doubts with

criticism but with evidence and encouragement. Similarly, God understands when we have questions and doubts. However, we should be willing to investigate the truth and humbly turn to the Lord for answers, as John did.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I have any doubts about God or the Bible? How am I dealing with them?

After John's disciples left, Jesus talked to the crowd about John. He didn't want anyone to discredit John because of John's sincere doubts.

Jesus reminded the people of John's unwavering character by asking, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind?" (v. 24). In fact, it was because of John's firm commitment to the truth that he was in prison (see Mark 6:17–18).

Neither had the people gone to see John because he wore fine clothes. On the contrary, John was a simple man, clothed in coarse clothing (see Matt. 3:4).

The people had gone to see John because he was a prophet. Indeed, John was more than a prophet. Jesus said he was the fulfillment of prophecy, the one sent to prepare the way for the Messiah (Mal. 3:1).

In spite of John's high calling and faithful ministry, Jesus said, "The one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28). Once again Jesus overturned people's traditional standards and value systems. John was great, but the one who came after was even greater!

John came under the old covenant,

but Jesus brought in the new covenant. The most insignificant believer under the new system of grace has advantages over the greatest prophet under the old.

The common people agreed with Jesus' words about John and about God's way. They had gone to John to be baptized, admitting their need to repent (v. 29). But many religious leaders—the Pharisees and law experts—admitted no such need. In fact, they rejected God's purpose for their lives (v. 30)!

Ask Yourself . . . How well am I living out God's purpose for my life?

Jesus criticized the Pharisees and law experts (vv. 31–34). He said these members of the religious elite were like children who got upset when other children wouldn't play with them as they wanted. In other words, the Pharisees and law experts didn't like John's and Jesus' lifestyles.

John's eating habits were different from theirs, so they accused him of being demon-possessed. Jesus dined with people they looked down on, so they called Him names.

Jesus concluded His condemnation of the religious leaders by saying, "Wisdom is proved right by all her children" (v. 35). Probably this means that John's and Jesus' teachings were proved true by the positive changes they produced in the lives of many.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I ever act childishly toward people who express their faith in Christ differently than I do?

C A Woman Honors Jesus (7:36–50)

Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.

—Luke 7:47

Jesus' critics called Him "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (v. 34). But He did not exclude the socially acceptable. On one occasion He accepted an invitation to dinner at the home of a Pharisee named Simon.

During the dinner a disturbance occurred. A woman, having heard that Jesus was there, barged in, carrying a jar of perfume. Weeping, the woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears. Then she dried His feet with her hair. Finally, she kissed them and anointed them with the perfume.

Jesus knew the intruder as someone whose life He had touched. But Simon knew her only as a

notorious local sinner (probably a prostitute). To Simon, the display he had seen was one more piece of evidence discrediting Jesus. *If Jesus is a prophet as has been said, Simon thought, He would know the woman is a sinner and would not let her touch Him and make Him "unclean."*

Jesus demonstrated His prophetic powers in a surprising manner. Instead of showing that He knew the woman's heart, Jesus showed He knew Simon's thoughts.

First, Jesus told a brief parable. In this parable a money-lender forgave the debts two men owed him. One of the debts was large; the other was small.

Jesus asked Simon which of the two debtors loved the moneylender more. The Pharisee guessed that the one forgiven more would love the lender more, and Jesus approved of this answer.

But then Jesus added something the Pharisee didn't want to hear. Jesus interpreted the parable to show why the sinful woman had

While at the home of Simon, Jesus "reclined at the table" (Luke 7:36). This table was probably a triclinium—a piece of furniture popularized by the Romans.



displayed signs of love to Jesus: she had been forgiven much. The parable also showed why Simon did not love Jesus: he had not been forgiven (because he didn't even know he needed forgiveness).

Earlier, when Jesus had come to Simon's home for dinner, Simon had snubbed Him by withholding the signs of respect usually given guests. These signs of respect included kissing the guests, anointing their head with oil, and washing their feet with water.

Out of her love, the woman had spontaneously supplied the signs of respect to Jesus that Simon had neglected.

Jesus assured the woman, who was still standing by, that her sins were forgiven because of her faith; then He kindly sent her away. The pronouncement of forgiveness caused a stir among the dinner guests, since they knew that only God can forgive sins.

Simon could hide nothing from Jesus, and neither can we. He knows our thoughts and motives. He knows if our hearts are full of insincere religion and hypocrisy.

Jesus also recognizes genuine love that flows from hearts that have been forgiven and that are full of gratitude. That is the kind of love He longs to receive from us.

Ask Yourself . . . What have I done this week that shows how much I love Jesus?

Luke 8:1–9:17 in Brief

Jesus told parables (8:1–21) and demonstrated His power over nature, demons, disease, and even death (vv. 22–56). He extended His ministry by sending His twelve disciples on a special mission (9:1–6). Herod Antipas was perplexed about Jesus' identity (vv. 7–9), but Jesus still attracted large crowds. At one gathering He miraculously multiplied food for them (vv. 10–17).

d Jesus Reveals His Identity and Mission (9:18–27)

“But what about you?” [Jesus] asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”

—Luke 9:20

If Jesus had only amazed people with sensational miracles and lofty ideals, His given purpose would have been unfulfilled. But astonishment was meaningless unless it led to faith in Him and to salvation. And for this, His followers had to understand who He was.

Privately, so that others would not misunderstand or interfere, Jesus quizzed His disciples about popular opinions of His identity. The crowds, they said, guessed Jesus might be one of the great prophets come back from the dead, perhaps even Elijah or John the Baptist. Peter, however, confessed the truth:

Jesus was “God’s Messiah” (v. 20). This answer shows that Peter had grasped that Jesus was the Messiah, God’s “Anointed One,” the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, Israel’s Savior.

But Jesus was also the Suffering Servant—something His disciples did not yet understand. So Jesus began to explain the rejection, suffering, and death that awaited Him. Perhaps He instructed His disciples to tell no one who He was so that His claims would not antagonize the Jewish leaders prematurely.

Ask Yourself . . . Who do I think Jesus is? What do my actions say about who I believe Jesus is?

After Jesus outlined for His disciples the suffering and death He would have to face, He began to talk to all His followers about the severe demands of discipleship. He explained that anyone wanting to be His follower would have to “deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (v. 23).

Bible students have long considered what it might mean to deny oneself. It might mean giving up control of our lives to the Lord. It might mean rooting out sinful desires that are slowing down our spiritual growth. It might mean being willing to give up

our own comfort in order to serve others. It might mean all of these and more.

When Jesus spoke about taking up one’s cross daily and following Him, His hearers knew just what He was referring to. When the Romans crucified people, they often forced the condemned to carry the horizontal beam of their own crosses to the place of execution (John 19:17). Every day, Christians must be willing to follow the Lord’s will even if it leads to pain and death.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I daily making a conscious decision to follow Jesus—whatever the cost?

In Luke 9:24–25 we have one of the many paradoxes that pop up in Jesus’ teaching. Here He said the

According to Matthew 16:13, Jesus was in the region of Caesarea Philippi when Peter confessed Him as the Messiah. Caesarea Philippi was on the southern slopes of the Mount Hermon range. The Transfiguration (Luke 9:28–36) may have taken place on Mount Hermon.



one who saves his life will lose it, while the one who loses his life will save it. The cross is not an attractive object, so the natural reaction would be to recoil from it and avoid it. But Jesus said that to seek life by avoiding the cross would in the long run result in spiritual death. Eternal life is of much more value than success, prosperity, or even a long earthly life. The one who wins without Christ still loses.

The shame of the cross may cause some people to avoid Jesus and not want to be identified with Him (v. 26). But those who are ashamed of Jesus now will have to face His rejection when He comes in glory.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever been ashamed of Jesus?

Verse 27 has caused problems for interpreters. What would those listening to Jesus live to see? Various explanations have been offered:

1. The transfiguration.
2. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70.
3. Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

4. The birth of the church at Pentecost.

5. The last judgment at the consummation of all things.

Luke 9:28–50 in Brief

Jesus went up to a mountain to pray with Peter, John, and James. There His appearance was changed to reveal heavenly glory, and Elijah (representing the prophets) and Moses (representing the law) stood with Him. Dazzled, the disciples heard God speaking in approval of His Son (vv. 28–36).

Afterward, Peter, James, John, and Jesus met a crowd gathered around the other disciples. They had been trying in vain to cast an evil spirit out of a man's son. Jesus complained about their lack of faith, rebuked the evil spirit, and delivered the boy (vv. 37–45).

In spite of their inabilities, the disciples argued about who was greatest. Jesus taught that the least is the greatest (vv. 46–50).

6

Jesus Begins Moving toward Jerusalem

Luke 9:51–62 in Brief

In Luke 9:51, we see Jesus beginning the pilgrimage that would lead to Jerusalem and the cross.

When Jesus and His followers left Galilee and entered the area of Samaria, they encountered opposition from a Samaritan village. Jesus rebuked James and John for their angry response to the Samaritans (vv. 51–56). Later He challenged several would-be disciples with the high cost of following Him (vv. 57–62).

a Jesus Sends Out Workers (10:1–24)

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. —Luke 10:2–3

Jesus sent seventy-two (some manuscripts say “seventy”) of His disciples on ahead in pairs to prepare the way for Him (v. 1). He used the image of a harvest to illustrate the urgency of the task (v. 2). Farmers do not loaf when

Luke 9:51–11:54

the harvest is ready to be gathered. Instead, they redouble their efforts, work around the clock, and hire extra hands. If the thought of ruined crops can motivate farmers, the thought of lost souls should be even more compelling to us.

Jesus was sending the seventy-two out, He told them, like lambs among wolves (v. 3). In other words, He was asking them to risk their lives because the work was important. There would be danger and hardship for those invading Satan’s territory. Still they were to go, trusting God for safety.

Ask Yourself . . . What spiritual harvest is ripe where I am right now?

Jesus gave the seventy-two disciples a series of instructions. These instructions show that the disciples’ task was important and that they were not to be distracted by lesser concerns.

Jesus told them, “Do not take a purse or bag or sandals” (v. 4). They were to travel light, with no money bag or luggage or extra footwear. Probably Jesus did not want them to be slowed down by material things. Also, He wanted them to trust in God to provide for their needs day

by day.

Jesus also said, “Do not greet anyone on the road.” By saying this, Jesus was not authorizing them to be rude or unfriendly. Instead, He wanted them to hurry along and not squander their time on the lengthy traditional greetings.

While the disciples were not to greet others on the road, Jesus instructed them to give the customary greeting of peace to the household where they intended to stay temporarily (vv. 5–6). If those in the house were truly people of peace, then they would welcome visitors who had come to their town with a message from God.

Jesus also told the disciples to stay in one house, not to move around from house to house within a town (v. 7). Possibly Jesus gave this instruction so that the disciples would not insult a host by leaving

if offered better accommodations elsewhere.

Twice Jesus told the disciples to eat whatever they were served (vv. 7–8). If they were served food not prepared according to the Jewish dietary laws, they were to overlook this.

In towns where the seventy-two were welcomed, they were to heal the sick and preach the nearness of the kingdom (v. 9). Christ would give them power to perform miracles of healing. Then when Jesus came to the towns, the people would learn much more about the kingdom of God.

But not all places would welcome the missionary pairs. In these places the disciples were to publicly declare that they were wiping the dust of that place off their feet (vv. 10–11). (Wiping off dust was an ancient symbol of judgment

LONG-WINDED GREETINGS

Formal Eastern greetings between strangers were always time-consuming. It wasn't enough to say “Hello. How are you?” Instead, people who met on the road were expected to ask and answer detailed questions such as “What is your name?” “Where are you from?” “Where are you going?” “How many children do you have?” This long-winded custom could easily delay someone on urgent business.

and release from responsibility.) However, they were to tell these towns that the kingdom of God was near—in this case, not coming near with salvation but with judgment.

Jesus said that on the day of judgment these towns would be worse off than Sodom (v. 12; compare Gen. 19). This reflects the fact that people who hear the gospel bear more responsibility than do people who don't hear the gospel.

The thought that His followers would sometimes be rejected evidently reminded Jesus of times He had been rejected. Like an Old Testament prophet, Jesus warned of judgment for the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Luke 10:13–15). These towns were evidently places where Jesus had concentrated much of His ministry and yet had met considerable resistance.

The people of Chorazin and Bethsaida—primarily Jews—did not repent despite the miracles they had seen. Jesus said even the Gentile towns of Tyre and Sidon would have repented if they had seen His miraculous works.

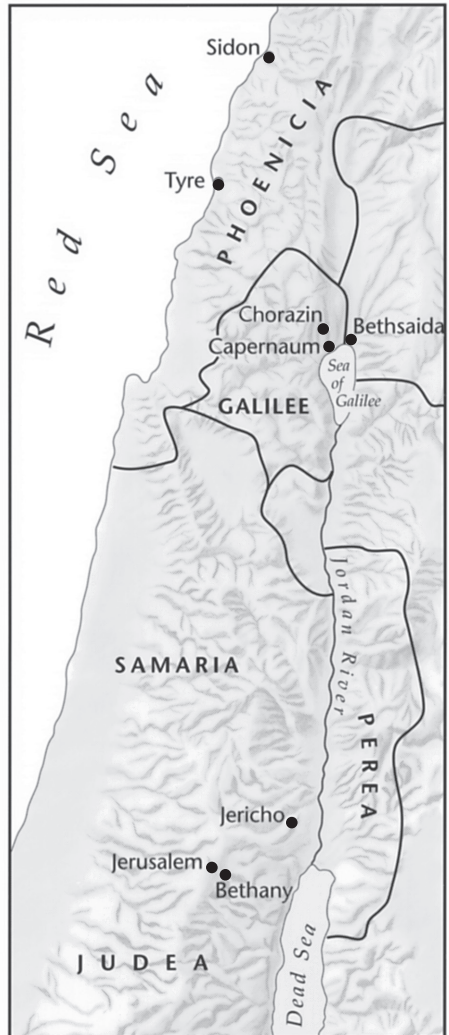
Thus those Gentile towns would be treated better on the day of judgment. Similarly, the people of Capernaum thought highly of themselves, and yet they would be brought down to Hades.

Before criticizing the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum too quickly, we should remember it's still easy to overlook the ways God works in our lives. We should be careful not to take the

Lord or His miracles for granted. We're accountable for how we respond to Christ's blessings.

Ask Yourself . . . How have I responded to Christ's involvement in my life?

Before sending the seventy-two disciples off, Jesus assured them that they represented Him fully. The



responses people gave to them were really responses to Jesus.

The seventy-two disciples returned from their mission full of joy and excitement. “Even the demons submit to us in your name,” they told Jesus (v. 17).

Ask Yourself . . . When was the last time I was full of joy and excitement over a mission I’d performed for Christ?

“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven,” Jesus replied (v. 18). Some commentators think Jesus was warning His disciples about spiritual pride—the cause of Satan’s fall from heaven. But probably Jesus meant that the seventy-two, because of their faithful service in His name, won a victory against Satan. The ministries of Jesus and His faithful followers in the world directly challenge the power of Satan, whose doom is certain.

Jesus told the joyful missionaries, “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you” (v. 19). Jesus had given His messengers special authority over both the physical and spiritual realms in order to demonstrate that what they were preaching was from God. Even so, many people would still reject this message.

While victory over the forces of evil was something to rejoice about, Jesus said it was more significant that the disciples’ names were “written in heaven” (v. 20). The biggest triumph we can have over the enemy is to escape his clutches.

Like His disciples, Jesus was joyful. He thanked His Father for the way in which the Father chose to reveal the gospel and gospel power. It wasn’t the “wise and learned” (v. 21), such as the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who received the truth. Rather it was “little children,” or the ordinary folk, who received these things.

Spiritual truth was hidden from the “wise and learned” because they thought they already had spiritual truth. But they did not really know God. No one can know the Father except through knowing the Son (v. 22). And it takes “little children” (v. 21), or open-minded people, to know Jesus through faith.

Ask Yourself . . . Did I accept the gospel as a little child might accept it—in an open and receptive way—or as a professor might accept it—after thoroughly investigating all the evidence?

After His prayer of thanks, Jesus addressed His disciples privately. In case they did not recognize their privilege, Jesus pointed it out to them (vv. 23–24). They were eyewitnesses of God’s power and earwitnesses of God’s truth. Devout people, including great political and spiritual leaders from the Old Testament era, longed to participate in the era that Christ ushered in, but could not. Jesus’ disciples—and each Christian today—is blessed to live in that era.

Ask Yourself . . . How faithful am I in passing on the blessings I have received?

b True Neighborliness (10:25–37)

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” [Jesus asked.]

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” —Luke 10:36–37

One day an expert in the Jewish law (a scribe) asked Jesus a question to test Him: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 25). The scribe’s question reflected the popular Jewish approach to finding favor with God. Most Jews thought one had to *earn* God’s favor by good works.

No doubt the scribe wanted to discredit Jesus by outwitting Him in public debate. But Jesus turned the tables on the legalist. Instead of saying something that might sound like a contradiction of the law, Jesus asked the scribe to use the law to answer his own question (v. 26).

The scribe quoted two Old Testament passages: Deuteronomy 6:5, which emphasizes love for God, and Leviticus 19:18, which says we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:27). Jesus approved of the scribe’s response and urged him to put his insight into action (v. 28).

But the scribe felt uncomfortable with his own answer: Perhaps he knew his behavior didn’t measure

up to the standard he had quoted. So he raised a technicality, hoping to justify his failure. He would be glad to love his neighbor, he implied, if only Jesus would tell him who his neighbor was.

Jesus responded with a story about a man who traveled from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jesus’ listeners would immediately recall that notorious stretch of road. In less than twenty miles, it descended nearly thirty-six hundred feet. It had plenty of hazardous twists and turns and steep inclines, with rocks and caves lining the way. The road’s conditions gave robbers ample opportunity to prey upon travelers.

That’s what happened to the traveler in Jesus’ story. Some men beat him, robbed him, and left him lying by the side of the road.

But the wounded man was not alone for long. Three travelers passed by in turn: a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan.

Many priests and Levites lived in Jericho. So perhaps we should imagine the priest returning home to Jericho after serving at the temple in Jerusalem. When he came along, he saw the victim, beaten and bloody. Now he was faced with a choice: to help or not to help. He chose not to help. Whatever reasoning he used in making his choice was inadequate to justify shirking his duty to show mercy to a hurting person.

Next, a Levite came along. He was a member of a group that was responsible for maintaining the temple and its furniture and utensils. Like the priest, he too may

An Ancient and Intense Rivalry

Racial prejudice and a history of animosity fueled the intense rivalry between Jews and Samaritans. Samaritans were Jews who had intermarried with people of other nations following the deportation of much of the Israelite population by the Assyrians 750 years before Christ. Samaritans were hated bitterly by the Jews, who prided themselves on their “pure” Jewishness.

Additionally, Jews hated Samaritans for their hybrid religion. Samaritans accepted the Torah (five books of Moses), but inserted some of their own interpretations. And they worshiped on Mount Gerizim rather than on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

have been coming from (or going to) the temple on religious business. But he, too, chose not to help the injured traveler. He, too, was guilty of being unmerciful.

Finally, a Samaritan came along. Since Samaritans and Jews generally hated one another, the Samaritan could have rationalized failing to assist the injured man more easily than the priest and Levite did. But the Samaritan did not do that. He decided to help.

When the Samaritan helped, he did so thoroughly. First, he administered first aid. He bandaged the man’s wounds, pouring on oil (which acted as a salve) and wine (which acted as an antiseptic). Then the Samaritan turned his donkey into a makeshift ambulance. He transported the man to an inn. Finally, he arranged to pay the man’s expenses. Since one denarius was equal to a

laborer’s daily pay, the two silver coins (denarii) that the Samaritan paid would probably have lodged the wounded man for several days.

Many people today don’t want to get involved. Society has fragmented as people have held each other at arm’s length. Many have retreated behind the security and seclusion of their own doors. They don’t want others to intrude, and they don’t want to get involved with others.

But Jesus called us to be neighbors, to interact with others.



*In Jesus’
parable
the good
Samaritan paid
two denarii
for a wounded
man’s lodging
and care
(Luke 10:35).*

We cannot be spiritual hermits and adequately love our neighbors. We have to be involved.

The scribe had asked how far he had to go to love others. Jesus had turned the question around. Instead of “Who is my neighbor?” (v. 29) the question became “How am I to be a good neighbor?” (see v. 36). The lesson Jesus taught, and the lesson we must live, is that we become good neighbors by showing mercy to everyone we encounter.

Ask Yourself . . . Who are my neighbors? Am I being a good neighbor to them?

At the end of the parable, Jesus asked the scribe which of the three passersby—the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan—was a neighbor to the robbed man. The scribe correctly answered the one who had assisted the man in distress. Jesus told the scribe to act the same way.

Luke 10:38–42 in Brief

Visiting in the Bethany home of His friends Mary and Martha, Jesus taught the guests who had gathered. Martha, unlike her sister, Mary, could not stop to listen to Jesus. She was too busy with dinner preparations. Finally, she complained to the Lord, asking Him to tell Mary to help her. Instead, Jesus taught Martha about spiritual priorities.

C Prayer and Answers to Prayer (11:1–13)

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

—Luke 11:9

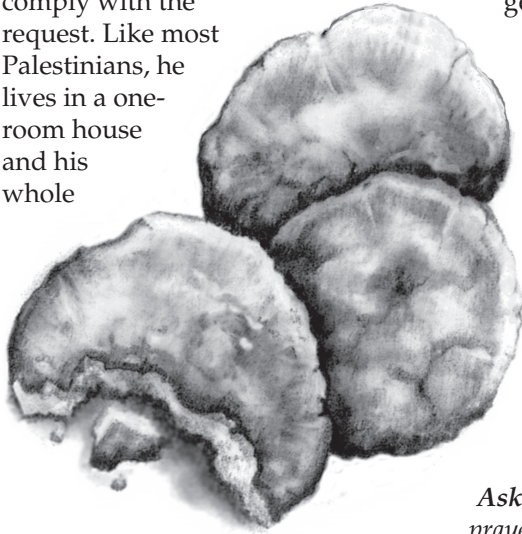
One of Jesus’ disciples saw Him praying, and when He was finished, that disciple asked Jesus to teach him and the others how to pray (11:1). In response, Jesus outlined a model prayer (vv. 2–4), containing elements we can include in our prayers:

- “Father.” We are to address God in a way that reflects our close, personal relationship with Him.
- “Hallowed be your name.” We are to have reverence for God.
- “Your kingdom come.” We look forward to Christ’s rule on earth.
- “Give us each day our daily bread.” We are to look to God for our needs, no matter how basic, on a day-to-day basis.
- “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.” We are to seek God’s forgiveness, which we can receive only if we ourselves have a forgiving spirit.
- “And lead us not into temptation.” We are to ask God’s help in preserving our spiritual health.

Ask Yourself . . . How much do my prayers resemble Jesus’ model prayer?

After offering a model prayer,

Jesus told a story to assure His hearers that if they prayed, God would answer. In this parable (vv. 5–8), a man goes to a friend late at night to beg bread for a houseguest. At first the friend is reluctant to comply with the request. Like most Palestinians, he lives in a one-room house and his whole



family sleeps together on mats on the floor. So if he were to get up, he would rouse the whole family. But the man outside is persistent and eventually gets what he came for.

We must recognize that God is not like the friend in the house. If this man was willing to respond to the pleas of his friend, how much more willing is God to give us the things we really need. He is not reluctant to give us what we ask, but instead is eager to do so.

That's why Jesus urged His hearers to ask, seek, and knock, for their efforts would be rewarded (vv. 9–10).

To strengthen His point, Jesus

argued that if earthly fathers give good things to their children, certainly the heavenly Father gives good things to His children (vv. 11–13). Although earthly fathers—like everyone else—are sinful, they generally fulfill their children's requests. The heavenly Father, who is perfectly holy, will certainly impart the Holy Spirit to those who ask for Him. Of course, we should not take Jesus' words as a blanket promise that we will get everything we ask for in prayer. Instead, we should take them as an encouragement to pray and to trust that God will answer all prayers that are in line with His will.

Ask Yourself . . . What answers to prayer have I received recently?

Luke 11:14–54 in Brief

Jesus confounded those who accused Him of driving out evil spirits by the power of the prince of demons (vv. 14–28). Then as the crowds increased, presumably wanting to see miracles, Jesus taught that such shallow desires revealed the wickedness of the times; He offered only the “sign of Jonah” (vv. 29–32). Then He warned His followers against trying to turn spiritual light into darkness (vv. 33–36). Later Jesus dined at the home of a Pharisee and used the occasion to condemn religious leaders for their hypocrisy (vv. 37–54).

7

Jesus Continues His Ministry in and around Judea

Luke 12–14

a Personal Courage in the Face of Hostility (12:1–12)

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

—Luke 12:6–7

Following a dinner in a Pharisee's home at which Jesus denounced the hypocrisy of the national religious leaders, He warned His disciples about the dangers of hypocrisy. Jesus compared the effect of hypocrisy on life to the effect of yeast on bread dough. Hypocrisy, like yeast, spreads its influence rapidly.

Hypocrites pretend to be something they're not; they hide behind masks. But all hypocrisy will eventually be uncovered (vv. 2–3). So pretending to be something we're not is futile. The truth will come out in the end. If our hypocrisy is not revealed in this life, it certainly will be in the next.

The aggressive hostility of the Pharisees gave Jesus an opportunity to talk about the hazards believers face. In verses 1–3 He warned the disciples of a *spiritual hazard*. But He reminded His followers that there was also a *physical threat* confronting them.

While enemies can cause physical pain and even death, that is as far as their power reaches. So they should not be feared in an ultimate sense. The one to fear is the one who has power to reach beyond the grave and inflict *eternal* pain. The one to “fear”—in the sense of reverential awe—is God (v. 5).

But fear is only part of the issue. The one to fear is also the one to trust.

God, who is aware of what happens to the smallest sparrow, will certainly not forget about us or our needs (v. 6). God knows the smallest details of our lives—down to the number of hairs on our head (v. 7). So He certainly knows when we are in trouble.

Ask Yourself. . . What happened during this past week that demonstrated God's care for me?

Jesus knew the disciples would face difficult times. But He promised that faithfulness in the face of persecution would be rewarded by a divine commendation in heaven

(v. 8). He presented the other side of the coin too: cowardice before persecutors would result in heavenly condemnation (v. 9).

After saying that whoever disowns the Son of Man will be disowned in heaven, Jesus backed up long enough to say that even a sin that serious can be forgiven (v. 10). (Peter would later become a living example of that level of forgiveness.) But one sin cannot be forgiven: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Any person who confesses and repents can be forgiven. But



A VISION OF *Hell*

“Hell” in Luke 12:5 translates the word *gehenna*—“Valley of Hinnom.” In Old Testament times, children were sacrificed to the Canaanite god Molech in the Valley of Hinnom, a ravine south of Jerusalem (see above picture). By Jesus’ time it had become a garbage dump. Both refuse and the corpses of executed criminals were dumped in the valley, where they were consumed by an ever-burning fire. Hence, *gehenna* became the symbolic name for the place of everlasting punishment.

a person who is actively and permanently hostile toward the Holy Spirit will not confess and repent, so he or she cannot be forgiven. Therefore, hostility

against the Holy Spirit is an unpardonable sin.

Jesus told the disciples not to be fearful when they would be questioned about their faith. Though these trial-like experiences might at first seem frightening, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would give the disciples confidence and the words to speak in defense of their faith (vv. 11–12).

John used the Greek word *parakletos* to describe one of

the roles of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). Literally, it means “one called alongside to help.” It was used to describe a legal assistant or a defense attorney.

Like the disciples, we don’t have to worry when we have the Holy Spirit as counsel for our defense. He will teach us what to say, whether our crisis is a formal courtroom trial or (as is more often the case) an informal “trial” before acquaintances.

Ask Yourself . . . How has the Holy Spirit helped me speak for Christ before people I feared?

b A Rich Fool (12:13–21)

Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.

—Luke 12:15

As the crowd listened to Jesus, someone asked Him to settle a family dispute over an inheritance (v. 13). Making such a request of a rabbi was not unusual. Rabbis often served as impartial advisers.

But Jesus refused to become involved in the dispute (v. 14). This perhaps surprised those who saw Him as being more insightful and fair than any rabbi they had ever known. Though He wouldn’t become a judge in the case, He saw that the dispute was rooted in greed. So just as He had warned against

hypocrisy (v. 1), He now warned against greed (v. 15).

Our society is driven by materialism. Advertisers bombard us with messages to convince us we need more than we already have. We must guard against this thirst for more things—for bigger and better things. We need to see what it can do to our spiritual well-being. Filling our lives with things can crowd out God.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I had such a desire for more material things that God has been crowded out of my life?

Jesus used a parable to illustrate His point (vv. 16–20). An ambitious man invested all his energy and talents in accumulating wealth. He looked forward to retirement, when he could take life easy and enjoy what he had accumulated.

But the man forgot to consider God in his plans. Even though he had barns full of grain and thought he could provide for his every need, his life would end that night. When it came right down to it, he could not control what happened to him.

Jesus said everyone who lives like this rich but foolish man will end up the same way (v. 21). But when we invest our energy, talents, and possessions in God’s kingdom, we become “rich toward God.” The return on spiritual investments stretches into eternity. And that’s really living!

Ask Yourself . . . What are my most valued possessions? How much of a hold do they have on my life?

C Trust for Daily Provisions (12:22–34)

Seek [God’s] kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.
—Luke 12:31

Following His parable of a rich fool, Jesus gave His disciples specific applications. “Do not worry about your life . . . Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink . . . Do not be afraid” (vv. 22, 29, 32). Jesus’ followers should not be like the rich fool, who was so concerned about his earthly needs that he forgot to trust God.

Worry is natural, but we need to be careful that worrying about the future does not dominate our lives—that it does not become persistent and crippling. Jesus said ravens, which the Jews considered ritually unclean, are fed by God (v. 24). If even unclean birds could count on God’s care, certainly we can.

Jesus asked His disciples, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?” (v. 25). The word translated “hour” is actually the word for cubit (about eighteen inches), so the meaning could be “add to his stature one cubit” (KJV). Either way, the message is the same: worrying doesn’t help anyone.

Jesus said Solomon’s regal splendor is of no comparison to the beauty of wildflowers (v. 27). If God magnificently clothes plants that live a single season, how much more can

we expect Him to do for us!

Worry can become so destructive that it actually becomes sinful. A life consumed by worry indicates a lack of trust in God and His promises. That’s the way many unbelievers live, but it should not be the way believers live. Instead of worrying about having enough food or wearing nice clothes, we are to pursue the things of God. “Seek his kingdom,” Jesus said, “and these things [life’s necessities] will be given to you as well” (v. 31).

Ask Yourself . . . How do I experience inner peace when others around me are upset or worried?

Jesus returned to the theme of investing treasure in heaven. He warned that wealth and riches distract people, disengaging them from seeking and doing His will. Matthew recorded Jesus as saying, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:23).

Some have wondered about how literally to take His instruction to “sell your possessions and give to the poor” (Luke 12:33). We are still to work, earn wages, and care for ourselves and those who depend on us. But our possessions should never possess us. Wealth should not taint our attitude with greed or selfishness. It may well be that Jesus’ instruction to sell possessions was meant not only to wage war on poverty but also to wage war on greed.

Rather than investing energies into acquiring earthly possessions, which are temporary, Jesus encouraged the

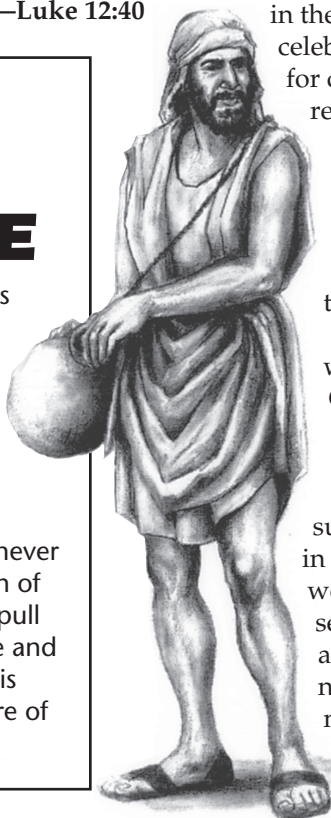
disciples to invest in heaven, where their investment receives an eternal return. He stressed that people invest their energies in those things that are most important to them (v. 34). He wanted the will of God to be the most important thing in the lives of His followers.

d Watchful and Prepared Servants (12:35–48)

You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.
—Luke 12:40

READY FOR SERVICE

Luke 12:35 records Jesus telling His disciples to be “dressed ready for service.” Servants in first-century A.D. Palestine wore loose-fitting robes that could easily interfere with their work. So whenever servants needed freedom of movement, they would pull up the hem of their robe and tuck it into their belt. This practice became a picture of being ready for action.



Next, Jesus taught that one day He will return to receive His followers and bring this age to a close. As we anticipate the Lord’s return, Jesus’ instructions to His disciples are appropriate for us.

Jesus used the role of servant to show how His followers should always be ready for His return. When we yield our lives to Him and trust in Him, He becomes our Lord—our Master. We become His servants, loving Him and wanting to please Him.

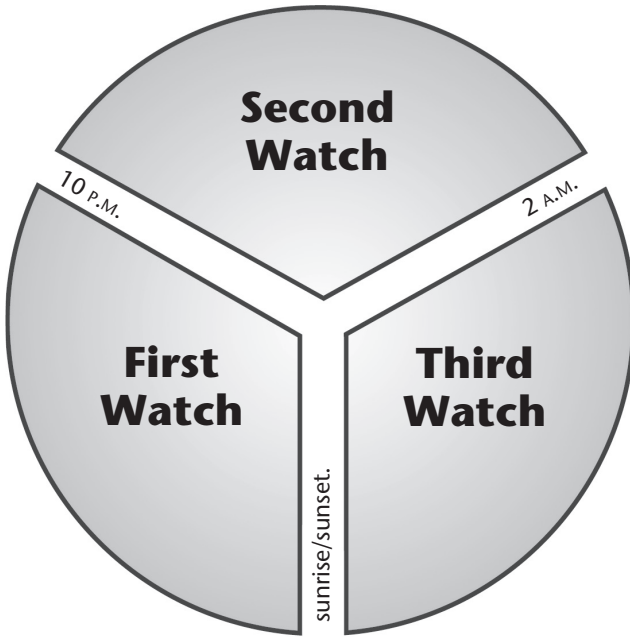
Jesus told of servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet (v. 36). Since Jewish weddings were held in the evening and the celebration could go on for days, the master could return at any time, day or night. The servants would watch for his return, ready even late at night, with oil lamps burning to open the door for him.

This shows us that we don’t know when Christ will return.

Therefore, we must always be ready.

Jesus described a surprising role reversal in His story. He said it would go well with those servants who remained alert well into the night looking for their master’s return (vv.

37–38). When the master returned,



instead of the servants waiting on him, he would take care of them (v. 37).

We are limited in our understanding of what eternity will be like, but we can anticipate a wonderful union with our Lord and unexpected joys as He welcomes us home. How incredible it will be to be served at His banquet table!

Jesus added an unusual illustration to underscore the abruptness of His coming. It will be like the coming of a thief, unexpected and unannounced (v. 39). This should serve as a warning to us (v. 40). We should remind ourselves each day that Christ's return is imminent.

After Peter asked Jesus who the parable was intended for (v. 41), Jesus again picked up the

idea of servants waiting for a master to return. He answered Peter's question with a question implying that although everyone is responsible for being ready for His return, the disciples—like a servant who had been placed in charge of other servants—had a special responsibility (v. 42).

Those ready for Jesus' return receive recognition and a promotion (vv. 43–44), but those who are careless face judgment.

Interestingly, the servant who deliberately disobeys (v. 46) receives a harsher sentence than the one who merely neglects to get ready (v. 47). And the neglectful servant receives a harsher sentence than the one who is ignorant of the master's will (v. 48). Clearly, Jesus was saying that the more we know, the more

responsible we are to act on our knowledge.

Ask Yourself . . . What, if anything, would I do differently if I knew for sure that Jesus were coming for His people today?

Luke 12:49–14:24 in Brief

Jesus explained that His message causes divisions (vv. 49–53). He chided the religious leaders for failing to properly understand and respond to what God was doing in their midst (vv. 54–59), and explained that all sinners face a tragic end if they do not repent (13:1–5). Luke 13 records Jesus' parables of the fig tree (vv. 6–9), the mustard seed (vv. 18–19), yeast (vv. 20–21), and the narrow door (vv. 22–30). Luke also recorded Jesus' healing a crippled woman on the sabbath (vv. 10–17).

While dining at the home of a Pharisee, Jesus healed a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body and also taught parables about humility and the future messianic banquet (14:1–24).

large crowds followed Him wherever He went. But Jesus knew that not all His followers were true believers. He was headed for Jerusalem and a cross; however, many were following Him because they thought He was headed for a throne.

Jesus gave three pictures of the kind of commitment He demands of His disciples. The first (vv. 26–27) may seem radical to us: Are we literally to hate our parents, spouse, children, and even our own lives? In first-century A.D. culture, however, Jesus' words would have been understood as comparing, not contrasting, love for Christ and love for family. Which do we love more? If our love for family and our love for Christ collide, only one can be first. To be Christ's disciples, our love for Him must be uppermost.

The second illustration is of a man building a tower, perhaps a watchtower to guard his vineyard (vv. 28–30). If he would fail to get an estimate first and would have to halt construction for lack of funds, the unfinished tower would be an embarrassing monument to his lack of forethought. Before we decide to be Christ's disciples, we must count the cost. Salvation is free, but discipleship requires unreserved commitment.

The third story of commitment was of a king with limited resources thinking about going to war (vv. 31–32). If he did not have the resources for war, he would turn to diplomacy. The message was the same: Jesus wanted potential

e The Cost of Discipleship (14:25–35)

Those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. —Luke 14:33

As Jesus' popularity increased,

Good Salt/Bad Salt

To fully understand Jesus' comparison of people to salt (Luke 14:34), we must realize that in the ancient world salt was a valuable commodity. It was used as a seasoning for food as well as a preservative. It was also valued for its medicinal qualities. Both Jews and Egyptians mixed weak salt with manure to renew the soil with fertilizing minerals.

But salt could be contaminated with impurities, causing it to lose its value. When salt lost its saltiness, it was good for nothing.

followers to consider what they were getting themselves into. Were they willing to give up everything for the sake of Christ (v. 33)?

Jesus still looks for followers willing to commit themselves to discipleship. He still wants only those who have counted the cost and are willing to pay the price. He calls us to be like salt (v. 34), to have

a positive influence.

Committed disciples influence those around them. They are a preservative in a corrupt world, a good taste in a tasteless society, and a means of renewal for dying unbelievers.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I positively influencing those I meet each day?

8

Jesus Teaches through Stories

Luke 15–16

a A Lost Sheep and a Lost Coin (15:1–10)

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

—Luke 15:7

“The Pharisees and the teachers of the law” (v. 2) were scandalized when Jesus socialized with people they considered sinners. Religiously strict, they held themselves aloof from all who neglected the ceremonial law and their religious traditions. They scorned and avoided the “sinners,” as they called them.

When the religious elite denounced Jesus for the company He kept, Jesus responded with three parables that illustrate God’s love for sinners.

The first parable (vv. 3–7) was drawn from the life of a shepherd. Shepherds were a common sight on the hills of Palestine. At the end of the day, when a shepherd brought his flocks in for the night, he would take a careful count. If even one

sheep was missing, the shepherd would leave his flock with other shepherds and retrace his steps, looking for the lost sheep. No matter how tired or hungry he was, he was committed to finding the lost sheep. When he did, he rejoiced along with his friends and neighbors.

Even the religious leaders believed God forgave sinners who repented and came to Him. But the idea that God would actively seek sinners was a radical concept to them. The Pharisees must have been shocked when Jesus suggested that God would seek out people they would not tolerate.

Yet the point of Jesus’ parable was clear. He said the inhabitants of heaven rejoiced more over the repentance of one sinner than over all of those who are so self-righteous that they feel no need to repent. The Pharisees thought they pleased God by scrupulously following the law and their traditions. But it is the repentance of sinners, not the legalists’ perfectionism, that causes a stir in heaven.

No one today wants to be identified as a Pharisee. But while we may not measure people according to Jewish traditions,

there are other ways to pigeonhole people. From childhood some of us are taught to look down on certain kinds of people because of such things as the way they dress, the way they talk, and where they live. As a result, some of us have long lists of people we don't believe are worthy to even hear the gospel.

The truth is that the Good Shepherd is seeking every single lost sheep. And when He finds one, there is great rejoicing in heaven.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I rejoice over the same things that cause rejoicing in heaven ?

In Jesus' second parable (vv. 8–10), a woman lost a drachma, a silver coin, and searched carefully for it. The coin may have represented a significant part of her savings and her plans for her future.

Another possibility is that Jesus was implying that the coin had sentimental value because it was part of a headdress or necklace. A married Jewish woman often wore silver coins on a chain around her neck. The necklace made up part of her dowry and represented years of sacrifice. If the

chain broke and one of the coins was lost, she would search for it as frantically as someone today would search for a lost wedding ring.

The details of the two parables are different, but this parable teaches basically the same lesson as the parable of the lost sheep. God seeks out sinners, and when even a single sinner repents, all heaven rejoices.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever lost something that meant a great deal to me? How did I feel? What does that tell me about how God feels about lost sinners?



Necklace made with first-century A.D. drachma.

b A Lost Son (15:11–32)

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

—Luke 15:20

In His third parable, Jesus again pictured God’s celebration over the salvation of sinners. But this parable is much more elaborate. Also, it has a feature the first two parables do not include: someone who disapproves rather than rejoices.

The younger son in Jesus’ story was rebellious. He wanted out from under his father’s thumb. He may also have wanted to escape the shadow of his brother’s favored position. He wanted to live independently—as he pleased. So he demanded his inheritance and went to a “distant country” (v. 13), as far away from home and father as he could get.

In a way, each of us is like the younger son, who wanted freedom from his father. Rebellion against God is within the heart of every person who has not surrendered to God. Sometimes rebellion is expressed subtly, as selfishness or wanting one’s own way. At other times it’s expressed more radically, perhaps as a defiant disregard for the law.

But whenever someone rebels and chooses to go his or her own way,

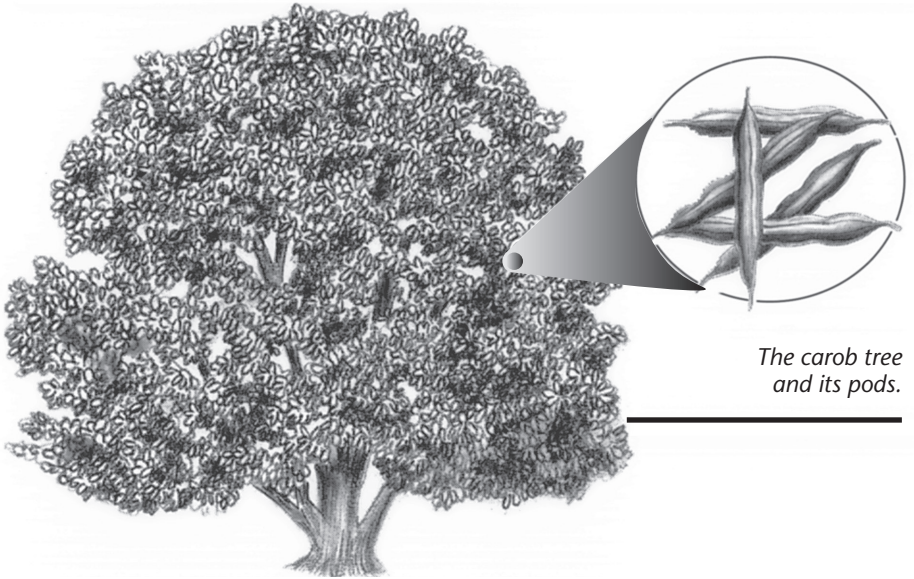
A Double-share Inheritance

In Jewish culture, the oldest son received the largest share of an inheritance—a “double share” (Deut. 21:17). The older brother in Jesus’ parable of the lost son would have received two-thirds of the estate.

It was not unusual for a father to divide the inheritance before his death. In such a case, little would actually change, since the father’s livelihood was a family enterprise.

there is a price to pay. Being free from authority means being a slave to the consequences of that freedom. The younger son eventually paid for his irresponsible behavior. When he had “squandered his wealth in wild living” (v. 13), he found himself suddenly “in need” (v. 14). The younger son hit rock bottom and had to feed pigs—an especially degrading job for someone to whom pigs were “unclean” animals. The son became so hungry that he wanted to eat the food meant for the pigs—seed pods from the carob tree. While in this miserable condition, “he came to his senses” (v. 17).

Those enslaved to sin seem to suffer a sort of spiritual insanity;



*The carob tree
and its pods.*

they can't even see what they're doing to themselves. Before they can find the road back from sin and rebellion, they often must hit rock bottom. It seems that only the full impact of sin's consequences can cause them to come to their senses and see what they've done. In love and compassion God reaches to the lowest levels of human despair to touch people with grace. But ultimately, repentance is a personal issue. A sinner must turn from sin and turn to God.

Ask Yourself . . . What caused me to turn to God in repentance and seek forgiveness?

The younger son's repentance was sincere. He confessed his sin and his unworthiness to be a son. Further, he determined to ask his father for a position as a hired hand. Hired servants could be dismissed after only a day's work.

God wants sinners to come to Him like the younger son returned to his father: confessing sin, sincerely repenting, and trusting in His mercy. God will transform the life of every person who returns to Him like that.

Perhaps the father, longing for his son to return, frequently interrupted what he was doing to gaze at the horizon. Long ago, his heart aching, he'd watched his son disappear down the road. But he always hoped that one day he'd see his son coming home. When it finally happened, he ran to meet his son.

The father is a picture of God. God longs for those who live in rebellion to come back to Him. He loves even those who hate Him, and His heart hurts to hear their insults.

In ancient Palestinian culture, running was something an older or important person simply did not do. Yet the father's love for his son

compelled him to break the rules. When he saw his son returning, he ran to him and kissed him.

Then the father ordered the best robe to be put on his son, possibly his own robe or maybe a ceremonial robe reserved for a guest of honor. He not only accepted his son back into the family but also accepted him back with honor. Shoes were something servants could not wear. The ring was a sign of authority.

The parable emphasizes God's long-suffering love for sinners, no matter how far from Him they have gone. But Jesus' story doesn't stop there. The father's older son was like the Pharisees and teachers of the law, always trying to do what was right, always trying to earn love.

"All these years I've been slaving for you," the older son complained to his father (v. 29). This is an illustration of service without love, of religion without joy. One son returned home to be a hired hand but found joy as a son. The other son stayed at home but lived as a slave, bound by his own resentment.

The older son felt deprived and unappreciated. Angry at the celebration for his wasteful brother, he refused to participate. But the father loved them both and went out to him, as he had gone out to meet the younger son. "Everything I have is yours," the father said (v. 31). In other words, the older son could have enjoyed and celebrated his relationship as a son of the father all along. But he never did.

Those who live like Pharisees may feel cheated. Doing good

may become a form of slavery that offers no joy or celebration. By contrast, Jesus wants us to enjoy our relationship with the Father. He wants us to celebrate His love.

Ask Yourself . . . Who am I more like: the younger son or the older son?

C **A Dishonest but Shrewd Manager (16:1–15)**

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. —Luke 16:13

Another parable Jesus told was about a shrewd but dishonest manager. When the manager's mismanagement was exposed, his cunning plan was to gain the friendship of his master's debtors by slashing the size of their debts. Then, he reasoned, after he lost his job as manager, he would be able to receive favors from them in return.

Some Bible students think the manager may have done nothing illegal by reducing the debts. Since Mosaic law prohibited the charging of interest (Deut. 23:19), these students think he may have simply cut the interest the master had added to the original loan. This view may have merit, but Jesus did call the man dishonest.

Although Jesus drew several lessons from this parable, it's

difficult for us to excuse, let alone commend, the dishonest manager in the parable. The parable certainly does not present a comprehensive model for Christian ethics. Yet for all the manager's faults, Jesus held up at least one of his characteristics as an example for us to follow. The manager was commended for his foresight. The manager was clever in the way he prepared for his future financial needs. In a similar manner, Jesus wanted His disciples to be shrewd in the way they prepared for their future spiritual needs.

Jesus wants us as well to be as shrewd as “the people of this world” by using “worldly wealth to gain friends” (vv. 8–9). Jesus showed His disciples that they could invest something material—money—in ways that would produce spiritual results. Money cannot last, because it is material;

it will end when life and this world ends. But even after money is gone, we can receive eternal rewards for the way we used it (v. 9).

The wealthy who keep their riches only for themselves are using their money selfishly. But those who are generous and use their material blessings to help others are making spiritual investments. When we use our money to express compassion and concern for others, then we are using our worldly wealth to accomplish heavenly good.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I investing my money in a way that will produce eternal results?

Jesus had still another lesson to draw from His story. He compared being honest in little things to being honest in greater things. Then, posing a rhetorical question, Jesus asked how someone who had been

Servant-Managers

A servant-manager was a servant whose job was to manage the master's entire household. All the other servants followed his orders, like workers under a foreman.

Often the master was an absentee owner who relied on a servant-manager to run every part of his business for him. The manager handled the household budget, which included business accounts. With such a high level of responsibility, a manager could easily steal from his master.

untrustworthy with material wealth could be expected to be trustworthy with ultimate riches—the eternal things of the Spirit (vv. 10–12).

The dishonest manager could not serve his master responsibly as long as he was a slave to money. His love for wealth and what it could do for him prevented him from doing what he should have done for his master.

Similarly, if we become enslaved to material things, we won't be able to serve God. Possessions and an unchecked desire for more things tend to push us away from the Lord. "No one can serve two masters," Jesus said (v. 13).

The Pharisees, listening in on Jesus' teaching, sneered—or more literally, turned up their noses at Him (v. 14). Their view of wealth was that material blessings are rewards for good deeds. They would do so-called spiritual works, anticipating physical benefits in return. Wealth was, for them, a sign of goodness.

Jesus let the Pharisees know that God was aware of their greed (v. 15). He said that what they "value highly"—the selfish accumulation of wealth—"is detestable in God's sight."

Ask Yourself . . . Which is spiritually more challenging for me: how I earn my money or how I spend it? Why?

Luke 16:16–18 in Brief

Following the parable of the shrewd manager are two verses about the relationship between the

law and the good news. A verse on divorce and remarriage may have been placed here as an example of how the Pharisees tended to overlook the spirit of the law.

d A Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19–31)

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." —Luke 16:25

Through the parable of the shrewd manager, Jesus told His followers to use money wisely. After the Pharisees scoffed at Him, He offered a graphic example of what happens in eternity to a person who uses worldly possessions selfishly.

Some Bible students believe Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus was His report of an actual event, perhaps about individuals known to His listeners. It is His only story in which He named a character. Others are reluctant to interpret it as anything more than a parable.

The rich man was extravagant in his wealth and lived in luxury. The beggar was not only poor but also hungry, sick, and possibly crippled. His name, Lazarus, was the Greek form of a Hebrew name, *Eleazar*, which means "God has helped."

In life separated by material wealth, in death the two were separated by spiritual wealth.

The rich man, finding himself in torment, begged for help from Lazarus. Lazarus, meanwhile, was being comforted; “Abraham’s side” (v. 22) was a symbolic expression for the blessings of paradise. Their roles were exactly reversed from what they had been on earth.

Jesus was not saying that the wealthy go to hell and the poor to heaven. Economic status does not determine eternal destiny. Lazarus trusted God; the rich man trusted his wealth. The focus of their lives, not the amount of their possessions,

determined their eternal destiny.

The rich man, unable to receive help from Lazarus, asked that at least his brothers be warned about judgment after death. But he was told that if they would not pay attention to Moses and the Prophets (a customary way of referring to the Old Testament Scriptures), they would not repent even if someone were to rise from the dead (v. 31). This conclusion may have hinted at Jesus’ own resurrection. The religious leaders would reject the one raised from the dead just as they rejected the true message of their own Scriptures.

Ask Yourself . . . Who is the “Lazarus” in my life? How am I treating that person?

The AFTERLIFE

We can draw several principles about the afterlife from Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

- How we respond to the Word of God affects our status in the afterlife.
- One’s eternal destiny is fixed at death.
- The righteous go to a place of blessing and comfort.
- The unrighteous go to hell, a place of torment.
- There is conscious awareness in the afterlife.

9

Jesus Ministers on His Way to Jerusalem

Luke 17:1–19:27

a Teachings about Sin, Forgiveness, Faith, and Duty (17:1–10)

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. —Luke 17:6

Moving toward Jerusalem and the climax of His ministry, Jesus prepared His disciples for the time when He would no longer be with them. He taught them basic truths they needed to know.

First, Jesus told the disciples that temptations “are bound to come” (v. 1). But then Jesus warned them about doing things that trip up other believers. A premature death would be preferable to living long enough to lead someone else into sin (v. 2).

Jesus talked of causing “little ones” to sin, but He wasn’t concerned only about children. His focus was on the spiritually vulnerable. That could include children, but it also means anyone who is young in the faith or spiritually immature.

“So watch yourselves,” Jesus said, warning about the disastrous consequences of enticing another believer to sin (v. 3).

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever set a moral stumbling block in the path of another believer?

Next, Jesus taught that when a fellow believer sins against us, we are neither to ignore it nor to become hardened against that person. “If your brother or sister sins,” Jesus said, “rebuke them” (v. 3). Some people use this verse to justify the harsh ways they deal with those who fall into sin. But the purpose of a rebuke is to lead to repentance. We should balance every admonishment with the attitude of tenderness urged in Galatians 6:1.

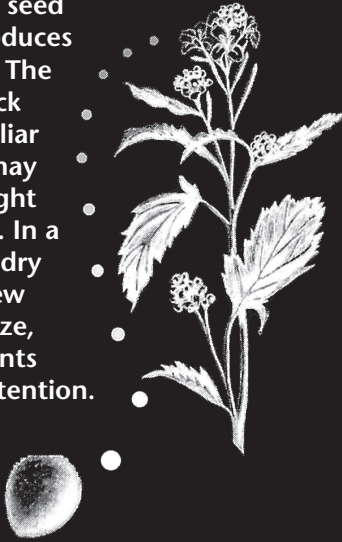
Once we have rebuked someone who has sinned against us, we should be ready to forgive if that person repents. Human nature seems more inclined toward judging than forgiving.

The rabbis taught that a perfect person would forgive three times. Here Jesus more than doubled the traditional teaching. But He didn’t intend that number to be taken literally. He wasn’t telling

Plants of the Parable

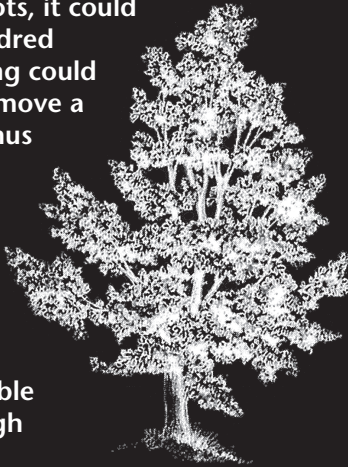
The Mustard Plant

A mustard seed is tiny but produces a large shrub. The cultivated black mustard, familiar in Palestine, may grow to a height of fifteen feet. In a region with a dry climate and few trees of any size, such large plants get a lot of attention.



The Mulberry Tree

The black mulberry tree has long been known for its strong roots. It was said that because of its roots, it could stand for six hundred years, and nothing could dislodge it. To “move a mulberry tree” thus became an expression meaning something humanly impossible. But even the humanly impossible is possible through faith in God.



us to keep records so that we can cut people off after forgiving them seven times. Christlike forgiveness is unlimited (see Matt. 18:21–22).

Since God’s grace and Christ’s forgiveness to us are unlimited, we should never tire of forgiving others. Still, we may object, “I can’t forgive him for what he did to me” or “I’ll never forget the pain she caused me—don’t tell me to forgive!”

Forgiving isn’t easy. In fact, it’s impossible if we try to do it on our own. Forgiveness is possible only when we ask God to do the forgiving through us.

Ask Yourself . . . What is the hardest time I’ve ever had trying to forgive?

Perhaps the disciples felt overwhelmed by the seemingly impossible call to forgiveness. “Increase our faith!” they pleaded (v. 5). But Jesus didn’t offer a quick-fix solution. Instead, He told them to use the faith they already had, even if it seemed no larger than a mustard seed. Even small faith is enough to accomplish seemingly impossible feats.

Jesus summarized His

statements about basic Christian duties with a parable. He asked His followers to try to imagine a master pampering his servant. They must have laughed at the thought! Servants were considered living tools—implements owned by the master. Servants did their work without expecting thanks, and none was given.

Christians are to be like servants who willingly do their tasks. We're not to grit our teeth and force ourselves to do good deeds to earn God's appreciation. In fact, no amount of good works could be enough to earn God's approval.

The world says we are successful when we are in control. Jesus says we are successful when we surrender. He wants humble servants in His kingdom, not power brokers. The mark of Christlikeness is humility, not arrogance.

Of course, the humility Jesus demands in verse 10 is genuine humility. We're not to say coily, "I'm just a humble Christian, not worth too much"—all the while hoping someone will contradict us and say how fantastic and talented and valuable we are. Nor are we to use humility as an excuse for not doing our best.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I act humble to impress other Christians, or do I have a genuine attitude of humility?

Luke 17:11–19 in Brief

Jesus met ten lepers and sent them to the priests to be pronounced

clean. They were healed as they went, but only one—a Samaritan—returned to thank Jesus and praise God for his healing.

b The Coming Kingdom (17:20–37)

The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the kingdom of God is in your midst. —Luke 17:20–21

Like most first-century A.D. Jews, the Pharisees were looking for a kingdom, but they were looking for a political leader who would drive out the Romans and set up an earthly kingdom. They asked Jesus for His opinion on when the kingdom of God would come (v. 20).

In response to the Pharisees' misconception, Jesus said the kingdom of God cannot be seen with physical eyes or be pointed out. He also said "the kingdom of God is in your midst" (v. 21), or "within you" (see NIV notes).

If "within you" is the correct reading, then Jesus was saying that the kingdom is internal and spiritual. But if "in your midst" is correct, then Jesus meant that since He, the king, was in their midst, the kingdom was (in a sense) already present.

In either case it remains true that the kingdom of God won't come

in its fullness until Jesus' second coming. Turning to His disciples, Jesus taught about that future day.

Jesus told the disciples that a time was coming when they would long for "one of the days of the Son of Man" (v. 22). Possibly this means that after His death, they would have troubles and would yearn for Him to return and deliver them.

While waiting for Christ's return, the disciples were not to heed reports that He had turned up here or there (v. 23). When Jesus really does return, it will be plain to everyone (v. 24). But before that glorious day could come, Jesus would have to endure suffering and rejection (v. 25).

The way things will be at the time of Christ's return will mirror the way things were in the times of Noah and Lot. In those times, the regular activities of life went on right up to the time of judgment. Thus these examples illustrate the suddenness of the second coming, which will bring judgment for the wicked and blessing for the righteous (v. 31).

Our decision to focus our lives on eternal values rather than material possessions must be made before the second coming (v. 33). When Jesus returns, it will be too late to change our minds.

Some might think they will be safe because they are closely connected with a believer. Perhaps they think they can ride into heaven on the coattails of a friend or relative. But even intimate relationships cannot do that for anyone (vv. 34–35).

When we stand before God, we will stand on our own. Only Jesus can plead our case successfully.

The disciples asked Jesus where the events He had described would take place. In reply, He apparently quoted a well-known proverb (v. 37). Just as we say "Where there's smoke, there's fire," first-century A. D. Jews might have said "Where there are vultures, there is death." The judgment associated with Jesus' second coming will fall wherever human hearts have been made dead by sin.

Ask Yourself . . . When I think about the second coming, how do I feel?

Luke 18:1–17 in Brief

In the parable about a persistent widow, Jesus taught the value of faith and the certainty of God's justice (vv. 1–8). In another parable, a penitent tax collector showed an attitude pleasing to God, in contrast to the self-righteous attitude of a Pharisee (vv. 9–14).

When people brought their children to Jesus so that He could touch them, the disciples rebuked them.

But Jesus welcomed little children, saying the kingdom of God can be received only by those with childlike faith (vv. 15–17).

C How to Inherit Eternal Life (18:18–30)

Jesus . . . said to [a certain ruler],
“You still lack one thing. Sell
everything you have and give to the
poor, and you will have treasure in
heaven. Then come, follow me.”

—Luke 18:22

“What’s missing?” That seemed to be the question that motivated a rich ruler’s meeting with Jesus. He had been raised to follow the law, but he still felt unfulfilled. There was a spiritual void within.

The ruler’s question reflected current Jewish thinking concerning the way to acceptance with God. He asked what he had to do to receive eternal life.

Jesus did not disapprove of the ruler’s calling Him “good,” but He did question whether the ruler understood the full implications of calling Jesus “good.” By saying “No one is good—except God alone” (v. 19), Jesus was not denying His own goodness, but probably was alluding to His unity with God as God’s own Son. Jesus’ response seems to carry the hint of a reprimand: “Why are you asking Me what to do? You already know what to do. Keep the law” (see v. 20).

Jesus could have done the ruler’s thinking for him by telling him that eternal life can never be earned by what one does. But instead, Jesus worked with the man on his current level of understanding and led him to discover the truth on his own.

The ruler protested that he had faithfully kept the law since his childhood. So Jesus told him to

The Eye of the Needle: A Gate?

According to an old tradition, Jesus’ word picture of a camel going through the eye of a needle (Luke 18:25) referred to a low gate in the wall of Jerusalem. This gate, which was for those who arrived after the main gates had been shut for the night, was called “the Eye of the needle.” People could get through easily, but camels could crawl through only with great difficulty—on their knees—and only if their cargo was unloaded. This tradition says Jesus’ point was that the rich can enter the kingdom only if they get down on their knees (humble themselves) and unload their possessions.

In some ways this tradition is attractive, but the Greek word used here for “needle” has to do with a sewing needle, not a gate. It seems more consistent with Jesus’ style of teaching and His use of humor and exaggeration to believe He meant a literal camel and a literal needle. Only God can save a human being—it’s an impossibility for anyone else.

sell all he owned and to give the proceeds to the poor. Then he would be free to become a follower of Jesus.

This command was not intended for everyone. It dealt specifically with the obstacle in this man's life—the issue that blocked his way to spiritual peace. Giving to the poor will not save anyone. In this man's case, however, his possessions were a barrier between himself and God.

Some may need to surrender in a similar way, if greed is a problem for them. Others who give their lives to the Lord will need to do something else. Jesus' call to commitment is individualized.

Ask Yourself . . . Is something keeping me from being an all-out follower of Jesus? If so, what is it?

The ruler faced a dilemma. He had asked what he should do, and Jesus had told him. Now he had to choose between riches in this life and riches in the next life. But the cost was too great for him to make the right choice and do what he knew needed to be done. No wonder he felt sad! He decided to walk away from Christ.

Jesus loved this man (Mark 10:21), but He let him go. "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" Jesus lamented (Luke 18:24). Jesus even went so far as to say that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (v. 25). In other words, material things can block a person's entering the kingdom!

Since many Jews of that day

thought God's favor comes in the form of material wealth and that only good people receive God's favor, Jesus' listeners had trouble understanding what He was saying. Most Jews thought it was the poor who would have a difficult time entering the kingdom.

Jesus had meant to shock His hearers and get their attention. But now He said that with God the impossible is possible (v. 27). Yet He left a clear impression that wealth can be an obstacle to salvation.

Peter still wanted assurance. Either out of boasting or more likely out of anxiety, he reminded Jesus of the sacrifices he and the other disciples had made to follow Jesus (v. 28). They were not rich men.

Jesus promised that all who make sacrifices for the kingdom will be generously rewarded (vv. 29–30).

Luke 18:31–19:10 in Brief

Jesus' disciples could not understand His predictions about His suffering, death, and resurrection (vv. 31–34). But Jesus continued toward His destiny in Jerusalem. Near Jericho a blind man's insistent shouts brought Jesus to him, and he was healed (vv. 35–43).

Another man, Zacchaeus, despised because he was a chief tax collector, was honored to have Jesus visit his home. He gave away half his wealth and promised to more than right his past wrongs. Jesus

said salvation had come to his house (19:1–9).

d **A Parable about Faithfulness (19:11–27)**

He replied, “I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” —Luke 19:26

Zacchaeus lived in Jericho, only seventeen miles from Jerusalem. It seemed the closer Jesus got to Jerusalem, the more expectations grew that He would announce Himself as Israel’s king and set up His kingdom there. To combat this misconception, Jesus told a parable implying that the nature and timing of the kingdom are quite different from what most Jews anticipated.

Jesus’ parable had

symbolic elements. To represent Jesus and God’s reign, a man of noble birth went to a distant country to be appointed king. Similarly, after the ascension, Jesus would be gone for some time before returning as king. In the parable, before the man leaves, he entrusts his servants with an assignment. Similarly, Jesus would leave His followers with a task to tell the good news and make disciples. Some opponents did not want the man of noble birth to rule over them when he returned. Similarly, many would oppose Jesus’ reign.

But the nobleman eventually did return to his people, just like Jesus will someday return to His followers. Some servants had faithfully invested the money their master left with them.

Like the man in the story, Jesus can reward those who are faithful to the ministry that they have been given for His kingdom. At the same time, those who are not faithful will have their

The Nobleman Who Would Be KING

One element of Jesus’ parable may have been based on an actual event His listeners would have recognized. When Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., he left part of his kingdom, Judea, to his son Archelaus [ar-keh-LAY-us]. But Herod’s authority existed only because Rome permitted it. So Archelaus traveled to Rome to gain endorsement as a client king—one who ruled over territory officially belonging to Rome. His request for the throne was opposed by people who sent their own delegation to Rome to argue against it. But eventually Archelaus was granted rulership.

responsibilities taken away. The wicked men who opposed the nobleman were put to death. This shows that Jesus' return will be a time of both reward and judgment.

Another detail in the parable has each servant given a mina, which was a unit of weight equal to about one and one-quarter pounds. In other words, they received that amount of a precious metal, probably gold or silver. They were told to "put this money to work" (v. 13).

The parable of the minas shows that the kingdom was not going to be set up in its fullness immediately. But in the process, the parable teaches some other ideas as well:

- The kingdom will definitely come. No one can stop it (vv. 14–15).
- Christ's servants are to be productively involved as they wait for His return (vv. 13, 15b).

- Faithfulness will be rewarded at Christ's return (vv. 16–19).
- Sloth and disobedience will be punished (vv. 20–24).

The inactive servant was not an enemy of the king. Yet he did not have a healthy relationship with his master. This servant was too afraid of his master to serve well. As a result, he was unable to give a profit back to his master.

The master took away the little the unfaithful servant had and gave it to the one who already had ten minas. This may seem unfair, but the principle it illustrates is an essential element of living under Christ's reign: If we use the abilities and resources Christ entrusts to us, we will gain even more; if we neglect our abilities, we will lose them.

Ask Yourself . . . With what has God entrusted me? How have I been using and investing those things for Him?

10

Jesus Begins His Last Week

Luke 19:28–21:38

a Jesus Enters Jerusalem in Triumph (19:28–44)

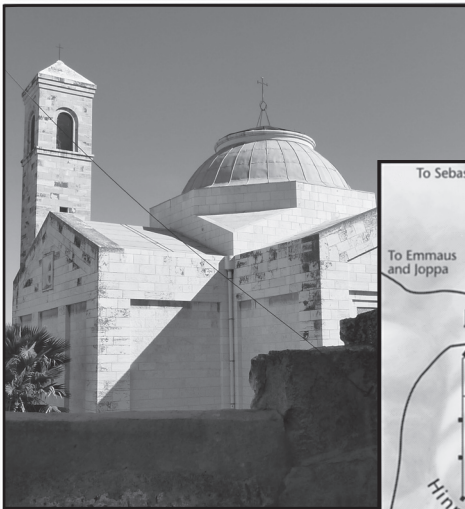
The whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

—Luke 19:37–38

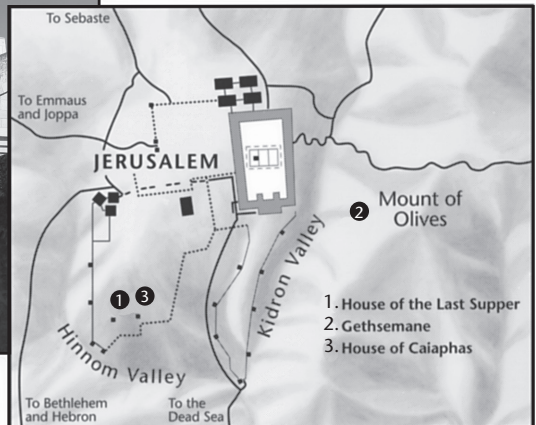
Jesus’ last week of earthly ministry began with a highly visible event. To the cheers of an adoring

crowd, and to the dismay of His critics, Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Traveling toward Jerusalem on the Jericho road, Jesus and His followers approached Bethany, a town at the southeastern foot of the Mount of Olives about two miles from Jerusalem. From Bethany, Jesus sent two disciples on ahead to Bethphage [BETH-fuhjee] to fetch a young donkey. The exact location of Bethphage is not known, but it probably was a suburb of Jerusalem east of the city.



This church is believed to have been built over the site of the home of Jesus’ friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha in Bethany (present-day Al ‘Ayzariyah in the West Bank).



Following Jesus' instructions, the disciples found the donkey and brought it to Jesus.

Some Bible students believe the arrangements were accomplished miraculously. Others think the owners of the colt knew Jesus and would not hesitate to let Him use whatever He needed. Still others suggest that Jesus had made prior arrangements, perhaps even using the phrase "the Lord needs it" as sort of a password (v. 31).

The news traveled swiftly that Jesus was arriving for the Passover celebration. A large crowd of Passover pilgrims went out from Jerusalem to meet Him. Those who were traveling with Jesus and those who had come out to meet Him joined in praising God. They laid branches and cloaks before Jesus to carpet His path.

The air was filled with messianic expectations. The people had been waiting for their deliverer. Now they thought Jesus was coming to Jerusalem to establish Himself as their Messiah. So they sang God's praises and chanted messianic statements (v. 38; see Ps. 118:26).

The meaning of the crowd's shouts was not missed by the Pharisees. They recognized that Jesus was being acclaimed as the Messiah. Angrily, they insisted that He halt what they believed were the extravagant claims of His followers: "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" (Luke 19:39).

But Jesus wouldn't allow the Pharisees to put a damper on His disciples' enthusiasm. It was

necessary and right for them to praise God. They had seen many wonderful miracles (v. 37), tangible proof that God's anointed deliverer was among them. The day was so momentous that even if people kept silent, inanimate objects would proclaim God's praises and hail the Messiah (v. 40).

Ask Yourself . . . How do I respond when I consider Jesus' power and majesty? How sincere am I in worshiping Him?

Until this time Jesus had generally discouraged public confession of His messiahship. He had told some people not to talk about the miracles they'd received, as if He didn't want word to get around.

So why did Jesus now make a major production out of entering Jerusalem? The time was right for Jesus to make a clear declaration of His identity.

Normally a man with a price on his head would lie low. But Jesus openly challenged His antagonists by riding boldly into Jerusalem for Passover.

Although He knew what His enemies would do, this did not stop Him. He was ready to be the Passover sacrifice—the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world (see John 1:29).

Ask Yourself . . . Does my life demonstrate that Jesus is my Lord?

In the midst of the celebration, Jesus experienced grief. From His vantage point on the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem and the temple lay

spread out before Him. He knew the acclaim of the crowd was superficial.

The people shouted His praises now because they thought He was what they wanted Him to be—a political deliverer. Within a week those expectations would evaporate, and people would turn away from Him in disgust.

About forty years later their beloved city and their glorious temple would be leveled. The calamity predicted by Jesus (Luke 19:43–44) was realized in A.D. 70 when the Romans built an embankment and destroyed Jerusalem.

Jesus knew the horrible fate awaiting the city, and so He wept. If only the people would open their eyes and see Him as He really was! But their eyes were blind to the truth.

Ask Yourself . . . When have I looked at the truth but not been able to see it? What finally enabled me to see it?

Luke 19:45–48 in Brief

Jesus did not tiptoe into Jerusalem. He stormed through the temple and drove out those who charged inflated prices for sacrificial animals and exchanged money at exorbitant rates. As the week wore on, Jesus taught at the temple. The religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus, but He was so popular that they were afraid to touch Him.

b Religious Leaders Challenge Jesus (20:1–8)

The chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to [Jesus]. “Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave you this authority?” —Luke 20:1–2

The Jewish religious leaders resented the way Jesus had entered Jerusalem and purged the temple. They thought He had overstepped His bounds. Weren't they in charge? Yet this “country preacher” acted like He owned the place!

The “priests” (v. 1) traced their authority to the law of Moses, which states that only descendants of Aaron could serve as priests. They resented Jesus' intrusion into temple activities, which was their area of responsibility. The “teachers of the law” (also known as scribes) were the law's interpreters. They resented Jesus because He explained the law differently than they did. The “elders” were respected leaders in the community. They resented Jesus because His popularity tended to undermine their influence.

Since Jesus had challenged the religious leaders' authority, they now challenged His. They demanded that He tell them who had authorized Him to do what He did in the temple. Apparently they hoped His response would expose Him as a fraud with

no legitimate authority.

Jesus turned the question of authority back on the questioners. If they could tell Him by what authority John had baptized, then He would answer their question (v. 3).

His comeback put the religious leaders in a bind. If they said John’s authority came from God, they would have to explain why they had rejected John’s baptism and message about the Christ. On the other hand, if they said John was a mere man presuming to have divine authority, they would feel the wrath of those who believed John was a God-sent prophet (vv. 5–6).

Neither option was desirable, so they backed away and said, “We don’t know” (v. 7). Jesus then refused to tell them the source of His authority. He knew they would not accept Him as Messiah if they would not accept John as a prophet.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I fully accept Jesus’ authority in my life?

Luke 20:9–19 in Brief

Jesus told a story about tenant farmers who rebelled against the proper authorities. The meaning of Jesus’ story was obvious: not only had the nation’s leaders rejected the prophets, but now they were about to kill the Messiah. So the land would be taken over by others.

The legalists wanted to arrest Jesus, but His popularity with the people paralyzed them.

C Jesus Handles Trick Questions (20:20–44)

So the spies questioned him: “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

—Luke 20:21–22

As Passover drew closer, crowds swelled the city of Jerusalem, anticipating the celebration. The religious leaders, meanwhile, were preoccupied with how they could get rid of Jesus.

They schemed to trick Him into saying something against the Roman government so He could be arrested on charges the people would not be able to dispute. Toward this end they placed spies in the crowd to ask Jesus, “Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” (v. 22). There was no way Jesus could answer this question correctly—or so they thought. If He said it was right to pay taxes, they could accuse Him of selling the nation out to Rome. If He said it was right not to pay taxes, they could accuse Him of leading a revolt against the government.

Jesus saw through their trickery and asked them to show Him a denarius, a Roman coin worth what a working man could earn in one day. Whose inscription and portrait did they see on the coin?

By saying “Caesar’s,” they essentially answered their own question (v. 25). But Jesus made the meaning plain for them: “Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” His opponents were left speechless.

The principle that undergirded Jesus’ statement is clear: To give the government what it requires is a citizen’s responsibility. So failing to pay taxes is actually depriving the government of what rightfully belongs to it. And Jesus endorsed this principle even though the Roman government was certainly not Christian—or even just.

But Jesus went one step further. If what is stamped with Caesar’s image belongs to Caesar, then what is stamped with God’s image belongs to God. Since we are made in the image of God, we belong to God. So we are required to give ourselves to God in service and worship.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I given to God all that is due to Him?

After spies sent by the chief priests and experts in the law failed to trick Jesus, some Sadducees made their own attempt. The Sadducees were a theological faction within Judaism who, unlike the Pharisees, did not believe in life after death.

These Sadducees challenged Jesus with a hypothetical situation that may seem preposterous to us. (What are the chances that a woman

Two sides of a denarius with the image of Caesar Augustus.



will want to marry seven brothers?) However, according to the Mosaic law, the brother of a man who

died without an heir was required to marry the widow. The first son of that marriage would then carry on the name of the deceased brother (see Deut. 25:5–6).

While the situation was improbable, it was possible according to the law. The possibility of the situation convinced the Sadducees that they had an argument against resurrection. How could one woman be married to seven men at the same time? Who would be her real husband (Luke 20:33)?

Jesus answered that the Sadducees were mistaken about the *fact* of resurrection because they had an erroneous idea of the *nature* of resurrection. Marriage and family relationships are part of the physical order of things. But the eternal age is of a different order—a spiritual order. There is no marriage or death or birth—all aspects of life in this age—in the afterlife. So the Sadducees’ question was based on false reasoning.

Jesus next addressed the Sadducees’ unwillingness to believe in what the Scriptures say about

resurrection. A number of Old Testament passages support the idea of life after death, but they are in the Prophets and the Writings. Since the Sadducees accepted only the Law (five books of Moses), they did not accept those Scriptures as authoritative. So Jesus pointed to a verse in the Law—Exodus 3:6—that would prove the resurrection.

Jesus' reference to "the account of the burning bush" (Luke 20:37) was to Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush (Ex. 3:1–4:17). God identified Himself to Moses as "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (3:6).

While all those patriarchs were dead at that time, God's reference to them implied their immortality. They were dead, but they had not ceased to exist. To God they were very much alive.

If Moses wrote about the God of the living-thought-dead, he must have believed in resurrection. And if Moses believed in resurrection, why didn't the Sadducees—who claimed to follow Moses—believe in it too?

Jesus met the Sadducees on their own turf and won the argument. His answer even pleased some of His opponents—the teachers of the law—who were pleased to see the Sadducees' argument against resurrection swept aside. But after that "no one dared to ask him any more questions" (Luke 20:40).

Ask Yourself . . . Are any of my beliefs based more on tradition than on the Scriptures?

After Jesus' critics had failed to catch Him with trick questions, He posed a question for them based on the opening words of Psalm 110. How can the Messiah be both David's son and David's Lord?

The rabbis of the first century A.D. believed Psalm 110 speaks of the Messiah. But Jesus showed that if they believed that, they would also have to admit that the Messiah is more than merely a human descendant of David. Why? Because in this psalm, David spoke of the Messiah using terms reserved for God alone. Jesus wanted them to see that the Messiah is both fully human (as David's descendant) and fully God (as David's Lord).

d **Jesus Denounces Hypocrisy but Commends Sincerity (20:45–21:4)**

All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on. —Luke 21:4

Jesus publicly denounced the teachers of the law for their insincerity, as He had before (11:46–52). He said they were dangerous because they were motivated by greed and a desire to be honored rather than a desire to serve and minister (20:46).

Jesus accused the teachers—who should have been servants—of being self-serving. They took



Paying the Rabbi

According to custom, rabbis were not supposed to receive pay for teaching. In fact, they were required to learn a trade so that they could support themselves and wouldn't have to depend on the people they taught for their income. That, at least, was the theory.

In practice, however, many rabbis received contributions from people who were hoping to gain credit with God. And the rabbis encouraged this practice. They let it be known that whoever donated part of their income to the rabbis would be "counted worthy of a seat in the heavenly academy."

advantage of helpless widows by taking what little money the women had. Widows in Jesus' time made up one of the most vulnerable groups in society. There was no pension plan, no social security, no government safety net. Worse, culture and custom were stacked against a woman finding a job and earning wages herself. Unless she had relatives to provide for her, a widow generally was left destitute.

The teachers of the law could put on a show and recite impressive prayers. But the way they treated those who needed their help demonstrated how their lives contradicted the front they put on.

Jesus had severe criticism for those who committed sins of social injustice. He said people who abuse their power and exploit the poor "will be punished most severely" (v. 47).

Ask Yourself . . . Am I the same person in public that I am in private?

It doesn't seem to be a coincidence that the next scene Luke shows us is an example of sincere and godly dedication on the part of a widow.

Jesus watched the people putting offerings into the temple treasury. According to some reports, there were thirteen collection boxes set up in the Court of Women in the temple. Each box had a trumpet-shaped opening. When coins were dropped into one of the collection boxes, they made a lot of noise. The larger the offering, the louder the noise. The louder the noise, the greater the attention the giver received.

Wealthy and influential people came to the treasury in grand style, wanting to get the most mileage out of their good deeds. Not only did they want to gain credit with God, but they also wanted to earn the approval and respect of the people. But Jesus spied a widow who gave her offering without any fanfare. Indeed, her offering was nothing that would impress

people. Her motives for giving were entirely pure: she loved God and wanted to offer herself and all that she had to Him.

The widow put in two lepta, coins worth only a fraction of a day's wage. She could have kept one, but



Two sides of a lepton.

she put in both. And that was all she had. So Jesus said her offering was “more than all the others” (21:3).

The rich gave “out of their wealth” (v. 4)—a fraction of their total affluence. But she gave “out of her poverty.”

Ask Yourself . . . How do I feel when I put my money in the offering plate?

It is not the amount we give that matters most to God. What God desires is people who love Him unreservedly. When people look to receive fringe benefits from their good deeds, God is not pleased. He wants us to give out of a right spirit, glad for the privilege of being part of the work of His kingdom.

Ask Yourself . . . How does God feel about the money I give?

Luke 21:5–38 in Brief

Speaking privately with His disciples, Jesus talked about the future. He warned about false messiahs deceiving them, calamities befalling them, and persecution afflicting them. He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem. He said that signs preceding all of these events would appear and ought to be heeded.

Throughout His final week, Jesus followed a routine of teaching in the temple during the day and spending the night on the Mount of Olives.

11

Jesus Faces the End

Luke 22:1–6 in Brief

Luke 22:1–62

As Passover approached, the Jewish religious leaders became more intent on doing away with Jesus. But Jesus was popular with many of the pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for Passover. So the religious leaders decided to wait until after the festival to solve their Jesus problem (see Matt. 26:5). But when Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples, offered to help them, they readily agreed and offered to pay him for his treachery.

a Jesus and His Disciples Celebrate the Passover (22:7–23)

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”
—Luke 22:20

In Jesus’ day, thousands of Jews from all over the known world made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover. As the Jews gathered for the Passover celebration in the city, little did they realize that as they sacrificed their Passover lambs, the Lamb of God was

about to be sacrificed to set people free from spiritual slavery.

Jesus sent Peter and John ahead into the city to prepare the Passover meal. They were to look for a man carrying a water pitcher and follow him. Perhaps Jesus used this strategy to keep the exact location of the meal a secret from His many enemies.

Some commentators believe Jesus prearranged the meeting as a way for one of His Jerusalem followers to encounter Peter and John at the city gate. Others, however, feel the meeting demonstrates Jesus’ supernatural knowledge.

The owner of the house to which Peter and John were led was evidently expecting them. Upon their inquiry, he showed them a second floor room complete with furniture. The two disciples then prepared the Passover meal.

When Jesus gathered with His disciples to eat the Passover meal, He told them how much He wanted to share the celebration with them (v. 15). This would be the last time He would eat it, He said, “until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (v. 16).

Passover was a reminder of

God's help in the past, but it was also an indication of God's help that was yet to come.

We marvel at God's miracles that freed the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery. But we also marvel at the miracle that sets us free from slavery to sin. The exodus from Egypt was a spectacular event. But the future exodus of believers from this sinful world will be even more spectacular. When the Lord returns for His people and exacts judgment upon the earth, then He will celebrate the Passover's fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

Jesus assigned new meaning to the Passover, and that meaning has become the model for Christian Communion. The unleavened bread reminded Jews of the haste in which their ancestors had left Egypt; it

reminds us of Jesus' body that was sacrificed for us. The wine probably reminded Jews of the blood that protected their firstborn from death; it reminds us of Jesus' blood that was poured out as a sacrifice for our sins. Quoting Jeremiah 31:31, Jesus Himself called the wine "the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20).

Ask Yourself . . . How does understanding the Passover meal help me more fully appreciate the significance of Communion?

When Jesus told His disciples that one of them would betray Him, they were dismayed. None of them could imagine who could do such a thing. So they began to discuss who it might be.

Passover Preparations

A Jewish family normally purchased the Passover lamb several days before the festival. They took the lamb to the temple to be sacrificed by the priests, and then took the lamb home, where they roasted it in the afternoon of the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan. This was called "the day of Unleavened Bread" (Luke 22:7)—meaning the day when the home had to be cleansed of all leaven. Passover began at sunset on that day, and the Passover meal was eaten sometime that evening.

In addition to roasting the lamb, preparations for the Passover meal included purchasing wine, bitter herbs, and loaves of unleavened bread—all of which had symbolic value. The meal usually included fish, vegetables, and fruit as well.

b Jesus Urges Humility and Trust (22:24–38)

Jesus said to [the disciples], “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.”

—Luke 22:25–26

The disciples’ discussion of who would betray the Lord may have turned into a discussion of who among them was the most loyal. Soon they were arguing about who was the best disciple. How disappointed Jesus must have been at the conclusion of His ministry to see His closest followers quarreling over which of them was the greatest!

Jesus had dealt with the oversized egos of His disciples before. Now as He faced the cross, He again had to stop their arguing. John wrote that at some point in the evening He wrapped a towel around His waist and washed their feet, taking on the role of a lowly servant (John 13:1–17). This could have been an effective object lesson to illustrate Jesus’ words in Luke 22:25–30.

Jesus explained how kings lord their authority over their subjects. He explained how Roman rulers proudly take on the title of “Benefactors” (v. 25) as a display

of honor even though they have performed little actual service to be worthy of such a title. But Jesus told His disciples, “You are not to be like that” (v. 26). He urged His disciples to “be like the youngest,” the ones to whom the least favorable duties were often assigned. Jesus said their greatness would be equal to the services they rendered to others.

It is the normal order of things for those who have power to use it for their own personal advantage. But Jesus said that order is foreign to His kingdom. In His kingdom, true greatness is measured by service, not status. Among His followers, the most important are those who serve with humility, not those who rule with authority. His is an upside-down kingdom where only those who bear a cross can wear a crown, where only those who wait on others can sit on a throne.

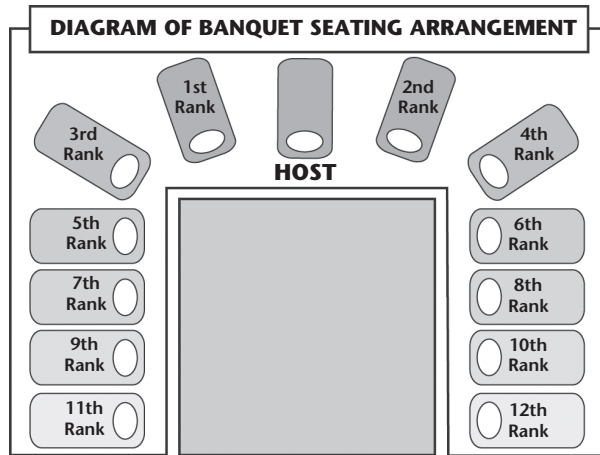
Ask Yourself . . . In my life am I striving more to serve or to be served?

Jesus had a special warning for Peter, the bold and brash disciple. (Peter may have argued more loudly than the others about his undying devotion to the Lord.) “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat,” Jesus told him (v. 31). Temptation would entice Peter to stumble, but Jesus had prayed that Peter’s faith would not fail completely. In fact, his temporary setback would be a means for him to help others. Jesus told Peter that once he had turned back to the Lord, he should strengthen the other apostles (v. 32).

THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE

The disciples may have begun arguing about who was the greatest when they first arrived at the upper room. They may have jockeyed for position around the table.

The custom in that culture was to seat guests at banquets according to their rank in society or the measure of their importance. The most important person was seated at the host's immediate right, the next most important at his left, and so on around the table.



Our setbacks and failures can become tools we use to help others who are struggling. When we are “sifted like wheat,” God can bring good out of bad. For instance, we can become more caring toward those who have been rejected when we have experienced rejection ourselves.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I gained special insight from a tragic or painful experience? If so, how am I using that insight?

In spite of Jesus’ warning, Peter remained self-confident. He said nothing could shake his commitment to serve his Lord, not even death itself (v. 33). Jesus, however, knew that human resolve is inadequate without the strength provided by the Holy Spirit. On his own, Peter would not be able to stand. “Before

the rooster crows today,” Jesus said, “you will deny three times that you know me” (v. 34).

How easy it is to be like Peter! When we are in comfortable circumstances, surrounded by friends, it’s not difficult to make bold statements. It’s much easier to be committed to the Lord in the emotionally charged atmosphere of a church service, for example, than in a hostile situation. In the upper room Peter was solidly for the Lord. But later in the courtyard of the high priest’s home, Peter would be tested in a way he had not expected.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever made a bold declaration of loyalty and then folded under pressure?

Verses 35 through 38 seem at first reading to contradict much of what Jesus had taught up to this point. Especially shocking is His

instruction to buy a sword (v. 36).

If Jesus' words are to be taken literally, He was telling the disciples to arm themselves in preparation for the coming crisis. In the past, when He had sent them out "without purse, bag or sandals" (v. 35; also see 9:3), they had been well received and provided for. Even those who had rejected their message hadn't harmed them.

But that situation was going to change. Quoting Isaiah 53:12 and applying it to Himself, Jesus explained how He was going to be treated in the upcoming hours (v. 37). In essence, as the people found out that Jesus was not the kind of Messiah they wanted, they would turn on Him and join the religious leaders in opposing Him. As Jesus' followers, the disciples would also be at risk.

While Jesus' analysis of the situation was accurate, He certainly was not telling the disciples to use violence to protect themselves. Shortly after, Jesus rebuked Peter for using a sword (John 18:10–11). So probably Jesus was using irony to shock the disciples into seeing the seriousness of the circumstances.

Most likely, Jesus was disappointed that the disciples interpreted His remarks literally and showed Him two swords. "That's enough!"

(Luke 22:38) probably means He did not want to hear any more of that kind of talk from the disciples.

C Jesus Prays in the Garden (22:39–46)

Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done. —Luke 22:42

It was common for wealthy people in those days to maintain a garden outside of Jerusalem—more as an escape from the city than as a place to raise vegetables. The owner of one of those gardens apparently made his olive grove available to Jesus as a place for Him to get away. So it was that after the Passover meal Jesus went with His disciples to the Mount of Olives to pray.

Arriving at the garden, Jesus urged His disciples to pray that they would not give in to temptation,



The garden of Gethsemane, which is on the Mount of Olives.

which they certainly would face once He had been arrested. But their humanity overcame them, and they found themselves unable to stay awake. Luke noted that they were “exhausted from sorrow” (v. 45).

Jesus’ revulsion for sin fully revealed itself in the garden as He knew that the cross was close at hand and that He, who had no sin, would be made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). In becoming sin on our behalf, the Son received the full wrath of God for sin while hanging in agony on the cross. This is what was in store for Jesus, who prayed that this “cup” of wrath be taken from Him. Yet in the same breath He accepted the Father’s will (Luke 22:42). The more He agonized, the more earnestly He prayed (v. 44).

In the garden, Jesus’ agony and sorrow were intense beyond all comprehension. Jesus was not, however, alone. In the depths of His anguish, an angel appeared to Him and strengthened Him (v. 43).

Jesus struggled in prayer until He began to sweat excessively. His sweat fell to the ground “like drops of blood” (v. 44). The word “like” suggests that Luke, perhaps recalling wounds he had seen as a physician, compared the dripping sweat to dripping blood. Some, however, speculate that Jesus experienced a stress condition called *hematidrosis*. This happens when small capillaries near sweat glands burst, allowing blood and sweat to mingle.

This account instructs us in at least a couple of ways: (1) If

overwhelming problems came to Jesus, then we should not be surprised to find that we sometimes have to face troubles; (2) Even at our weakest moment, God can minister to our need and help us.

Ask Yourself . . . What is the greatest crisis I have ever had to face? How did I face it?

Finished with His prayer, Jesus rejoined the disciples and found them sleeping. He woke them and urged them again to pray for spiritual protection (vv. 45–46).

Sometimes prayer should come before everything else.

d Jesus Is Betrayed and Arrested (22:47–53)

Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” —Luke 22:48

The sounds of an approaching crowd and the rattle of weapons disturbed the quiet of the garden. Leading the crowd of priests, temple guards, and elders was Judas. He greeted Jesus with a kiss. There was affection on his lips but treachery in his heart. Though his appearance seemed right, Jesus saw the evil his actions were meant to mask (v. 48).

Judas had trouble with hypocrisy, but Peter had other problems. He and the rest of the disciples wanted to control the situation. They had their own ideas of what should

be done to face the threat to their Master. Just hours before, Peter had spoken bravely in the upper room. Now he attempted to prove himself and back up his courageous words.

Peter swung a sword and sliced off the right ear of Malchus [MAL-kuss], the high priest’s servant (John 18:10). But before the fight really got going, Jesus put a halt to the violence and healed the injured man (Luke 22:51).

Like Peter, we may find that it is easy to become defensive in a crisis. Surrender, on the other hand, is even more difficult.

Our natural response is to swing into action when threatened. The unnatural response (or more properly, the supernatural response) is to quietly trust God to help us in a crisis.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever acted rashly in a crisis when I should have trusted God to help me through it?

Jesus’ expert use of satire is clearly seen in verses 52 and 53. A small army had come to arrest Jesus—as though He were a kind of dangerous revolutionary. He incisively pointed out how ludicrous that looked by saying He had been accessible to the authorities every day



The short sword may have been the type used by Peter while defending Jesus on the Mount of Olives.

while teaching in the temple, but no one had made a move to arrest Him.

Jesus knew that the authorities came after Him in the dead of night because they wanted the darkness to conceal their deed. And symbolically it was appropriate for such an evil action to be taken in the darkness.

e Peter Denies the Lord (22:54–62)

The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly. —Luke 22:61–62

After His arrest Jesus was taken to the home of the high priest for a preliminary investigation. Peter and John (see John 18:15) followed and were able to get inside the courtyard of the house. Peter was warming himself when a servant girl looked at him in the firelight and announced that he was one of Jesus’ followers. She had evidently seen Jesus and Peter together.

Caught off guard, Peter quickly denied the charge: “I don’t know him” (Luke 22:57). But then someone else challenged Peter, and again he denied he was a follower of Jesus (v. 58). After about an hour, a third person said Peter must have been with Jesus, since his accent revealed that he was from Galilee (v. 59; Matt. 26:73). Peter protested

strongly: “I don’t know what you’re talking about!” (Luke 22:60).

At precisely that moment a rooster began to crow. Then Jesus (possibly inside one of the rooms just off the courtyard) turned and caught Peter’s eye. He “looked straight at Peter” (v. 61), as if to say, “See, you did deny Me.”

Peter was immediately overcome with remorse. He realized that he had done the very thing he had ardently pledged not to do. He rushed out of the courtyard and sobbed in sorrow. His denial of the Lord was tragic, but his immediate repentance made it possible for

him to later reaffirm his loyalty for Jesus (see John 21:15–19).

Ask Yourself . . . Since becoming a Christian, have I in any way denied the Lord?

Life can sometimes seem to be a series of setbacks and failures. Sin can catch us off guard and trip us up. But no matter what we have done, there is always hope until we give up hope. The grace of God can help us, like Peter, to recover and once again follow the Lord.



Tradition holds that Peter warmed himself by a fire in this courtyard, in the house of Caiaphas, while Jesus was being questioned by Annas.

12

Jesus Is Crucified

Luke 22:63–23:56

a **Jesus Is Beaten and Condemned (22:63–71)**

**“If you are the Messiah,” they said,
“tell us.” Jesus answered, “If I tell
you, you will not believe me.”**

—Luke 22:67

Luke said nothing about Jesus’ being taken to Annas after His arrest (John 18:12–13). He also did not record the details of Jesus’ early morning appearance before Caiaphas, the high priest (Luke 22:54). But from the cruel and insulting treatment Jesus received from His captors following Caiaphas’s interview (vv. 63–65), we can conclude that the high priest had been aggressively hostile (see Matt. 26:65–66).

Jesus had been interrogated by Caiaphas and found guilty by members of the Sanhedrin during a middle-of-the-night session. But it was not legal for the council to condemn Him at night. So to satisfy legal technicalities, the high priest waited until dawn to convene an official session of the Sanhedrin.

The council members asked Jesus if He was the Messiah (which means “Anointed One”). Jesus did not answer the council members’ question directly. He knew if He admitted to being the Christ, they could take Him before the Romans and accuse Him of claiming to be a king. While Jesus was a king, His kingdom is a spiritual one, not a kingdom of this world (John 18:36). Instead of answering directly, Jesus used the messianic language of Daniel: “The Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God” (Luke 22:69; compare Dan. 7:13–14).

Jesus’ answer to the Sanhedrin’s next question—“Are you then the Son of God?”—sealed the council’s decision (Luke 22:70). When Jesus admitted that He was indeed the Son of God, the Sanhedrin members reacted strongly to what they saw as blasphemy. As far as they were concerned, there was now no question but that Jesus should be put to death.

Ask Yourself. . . Do I accept Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God?

The Sanhedrin:

Center
of
Jewish Power

Seventy-one of the Jewish nation's most influential men made up the Sanhedrin, the supreme council of the Jews. It was presided over by the high priest.

In addition to the high priest, the Sanhedrin was comprised of

●
CHIEF PRIESTS

Members of important, priestly families, mostly Sadducees

●
ELDERS

Non-priestly aristocrats, also mostly Sadducees

●
and **SCRIBES**

Interpreters of the law, mostly Pharisees.

Since Judea was an occupied area, the Sanhedrin functioned under the authority of the Roman government. It decided all issues involving religious law and acted in some civil and criminal cases.

At the time of Jesus' trial, the Sanhedrin did not have the authority to act in capital cases. The Roman government reserved the right of execution to itself.

b Jesus Is Taken to Pilate (23:1-7)

So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "You have said so," Jesus replied. Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

—Luke 23:3-4

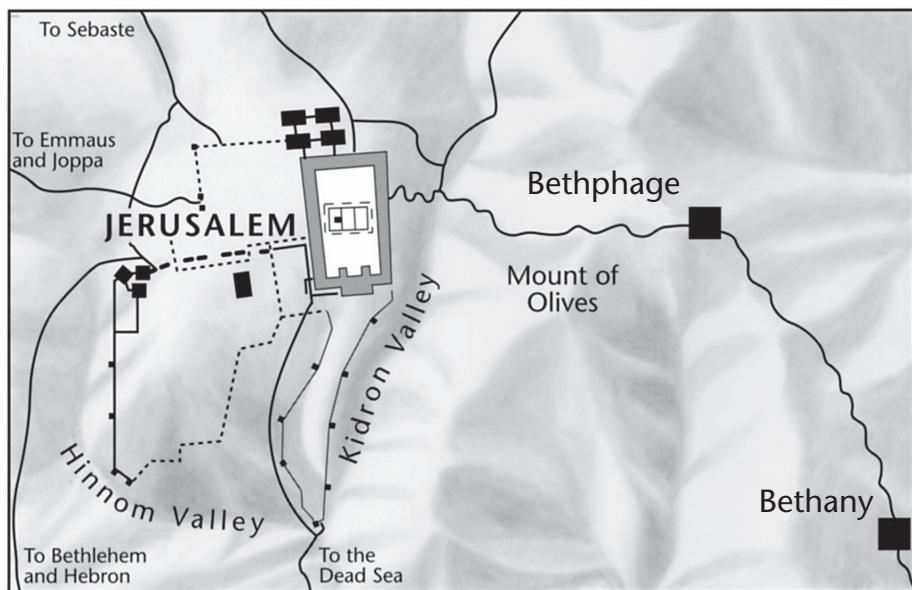
Since Judea was ruled by Rome, the Sanhedrin could not put Jesus to death. To have Him executed, they had to convince the Roman governor—Pontius Pilate—that Jesus was a threat to Rome. Therefore, they had to cast their accusation of Jesus in political terms.

The Sanhedrin accused Jesus of "subverting our nation" (v. 2), and supported their charge with two concocted pieces of evidence:

1. He was opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar (v. 2b). This charge was guaranteed to get the attention of Pilate. No Roman ruler could afford to ignore such a charge. It probably was an intentional distortion of Jesus' words when He said, "Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (20:25).

2. He was claiming to be a king (23:2c). This was the main attention-getting accusation. Indeed, this claim was the truth, but the truth told in a way to communicate a false message (v. 3).

Pilate took the Sanhedrin's accusation seriously enough



to question Jesus. We may not have a record of the entire interrogation, but at the least we know Pilate asked about claims to royalty. Jesus admitted that He was the king of the Jews.

Pilate probably didn't understand the special sense in which Jesus was a king. But he had enough insight to realize Jesus presented no real threat to Roman power. Pilate told the Sanhedrin he didn't believe their accusation.

But the Sanhedrin would not take no for an answer. They provided new evidence for their charge of subversion by saying that Jesus had stirred up dangerous excitement in the population of Palestine—from His home territory of Galilee to the nation's center, Jerusalem.

When Pilate learned Jesus was from Galilee, he thought he had

found a way out of his dilemma. He sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch (governor) of Galilee.

Herod was in Jerusalem for Passover. Pilate hoped Herod would relieve him of the responsibility of making a decision.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever tried to take an easy way out of a tough problem—instead of confronting the problem head-on?

Luke 23:8–12 in Brief

Herod wanted to see Jesus because of all the things he'd heard about Him. But Jesus stood silent before Herod and would not perform any miracles.

So Herod and his soldiers ridiculed Jesus, then sent Him back to Pilate.

Pilate for the Defense

For whatever reason, Pilate made repeated attempts to protect Jesus from the wrath of the Jewish religious leaders:

- After a preliminary interrogation, Pilate announced, “I find no basis for a charge against this man” (Luke 23:4).
- After Jesus was sent back from Herod, Pilate suggested a compromise: scourging instead of crucifixion (v. 16).
- As a custom that was part of the Passover feast, Pilate offered to release either Jesus or Barabbas—apparently hoping the people would choose Jesus. When they urged that Jesus be crucified, Pilate asked, “Why? What crime has he committed?” (Matt. 27:23).
- Pilate made a second appeal to the people (Luke 23:20).
- Pilate made a third appeal (v. 22).

C Jesus Is Sentenced by Pilate (23:13–25)

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” —Luke 23:20–21

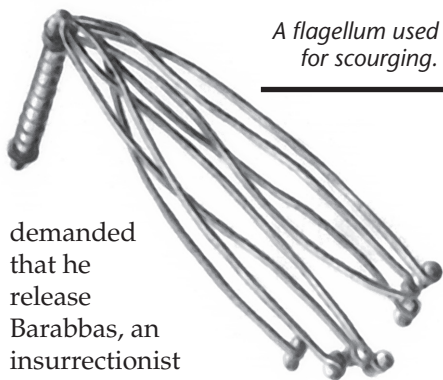
There is something almost surreal about Jesus’ second appearance before Pilate. The Roman governor was defending a Jew being accused by His own people. In this case the judge almost seems to play the role of a defense attorney.

Clearly, Pilate wanted to release Jesus. After reviewing the case with Jesus’ accusers, he reaffirmed his belief in Jesus’ innocence (v. 14) and even used Herod as a character witness (v. 15). But Pilate was enough of a politician to recognize

that the Jewish leaders would lose face if Jesus were simply released. So he offered a compromise: he would punish Jesus before releasing Him.

The punishment Pilate probably had in mind was scourging. Scourging was a (usually) nonlethal beating with leather straps studded with bone or metal. The lashes cut into the back of the victim, and if the beating was severe enough, the person could die.

But even Pilate’s offer to severely punish Jesus would not satisfy the council members’ thirst for Jesus’ blood. Pilate wanted to make Jesus the prisoner he released that year, as according to custom he did every year at Passover. (The custom of releasing a prisoner at Passover time may have been a symbolic reenactment of the freeing of the Hebrew slaves.) But the people



A flagellum used for scourging.

demanded that he release Barabbas, an insurrectionist and murderer.

The contrast between the two men is striking. Barabbas was *guilty* of insurrection; Jesus was being *falsely accused* of insurrection. But when the people were given a choice, they chose Barabbas.

(A textual note: Verse 17 does not appear in the best manuscripts of Luke, so it does not appear in the main text of the NIV. Most likely a copyist borrowed it from Mark 15:6 to explain why the people were demanding that Barabbas be released [Luke 23:18].)

Twice more Pilate appealed to the crowd, again saying he would punish and release Jesus. But finally Pilate gave in to the crowd and turned Jesus over to be crucified.

A crowd can greatly influence an individual's decisions. It's not easy to resist the current of popular opinion. We might criticize Pilate for his lack of backbone, but how often do we swim against the current?

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever done something I knew was wrong because of pressure from other people? If so, how did I feel afterward?

Luke 23:26–31 in Brief

It was the custom for a condemned criminal to carry the beam of his cross to the place of execution. But Jesus was too weak to carry His cross all the way. So the soldiers drafted Simon, who was from the city of Cyrene in northern Africa and a spectator in the crowd, to carry the cross.

A group of women followed the procession through the streets of Jerusalem, wailing as Jesus was led away to die. But Jesus told them they should cry for themselves instead. A time was coming when the people of Jerusalem would experience a great calamity.

d Jesus Is Placed on a Cross (23:32–43)

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified [Jesus] there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. —Luke 23:33

The place of Jesus' execution was called "the Skull"—possibly so named for the shape of the rock formation. (The English word "Calvary" comes from *calvaria*, the Latin word for "skull" in the Vulgate [Jerome's Latin version of the Bible]. Luke used the Greek word *kranion* rather than Golgotha [an Aramaic word] because he was writing for Greeks.) There the



The location of Golgotha is not known with certainty. This hill—known as Gordon's Calvary—outside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem is one possibility. To the south, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre stands over the traditional site of the crucifixion (also originally outside the Old City walls).

forgiveness—a strategic characteristic of the Christlike life.

Ask Yourself . . . In what situation has it been most difficult for me to be forgiving?

Seeing Jesus on the cross, the rulers of the Jews felt they had gained the upper hand (23:35). They began to sneer, mocking Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. The soldiers also taunted Him: "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself" (v. 37).

What they all failed to realize was that Jesus had chosen to die. He voluntarily

soldiers crucified Jesus between two robbers, fulfilling a prophecy that He would be "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12).

Luke gave few details of the execution itself, possibly thinking details about the physical horrors would deflect attention away from the significance of Jesus' crucifixion. Many people had suffered crucifixion, but only one man bore the sins of the world on a cross.

From the cross Jesus prayed that those who were crucifying Him would be forgiven (Luke 23:34). Whereas His executioners gambled for His clothing, the innocent victim prayed for those who were guilty.

Jesus' teaching about forgiving those who wrong us (6:27–36) has meaning because He modeled

submitted to suffering and willingly gave His life as payment for the sins of the world.

The placard above Jesus' head (v. 38) may have inspired the soldiers' taunts. Or they may have heard some of the accusations at Jesus' trial before Pilate (vv. 2–3).

Identifying the crimes of a crucifixion victim was standard practice, for crucifixion was intended to deter crime as well as punish the criminal. The two robbers crucified with Jesus also mocked Him (Mark 15:32). But one of them recognized Jesus' innocence. This robber had a change of heart and defended Jesus to the other. The repentant robber asked Jesus to remember

The Crucifixion Foretold	PROPHECY	FULFILLMENT
Jesus was betrayed by a friend	Ps. 41:9	Luke 22:47
Jesus was mocked	Ps. 22:6–8	Luke 22:63
Jesus was falsely accused	Ps. 35:11	Luke 23:2
Jesus was rejected	Isa. 53:3	Luke 23:18
Jesus died with and for sinners	Isa. 53:12	Luke 23:32
Jesus' hands and feet were pierced	Ps. 22:16	Luke 23:33
Jesus' cloak was gambled for	Ps. 22:18	Matt. 27:35
Jesus was given wine vinegar	Ps. 69:21	Luke 23:36
Jesus' bones were not broken	Ps. 34:20	John 19:33
Jesus was buried in a rich man's tomb	Isa. 53:9	Mark 15:43
Jesus' body did not decay	Ps. 16:10	Luke 24:6

him when He came into His kingdom (Luke 23:42).

Jesus' mercy to the dying robber should encourage any person who thinks he or she has gone too far or waited too long to turn to Christ. It is more rewarding to turn to the Lord early in life, but it is never too late. At the brink of death, after a life of crime, this man received assurance from the Lord that he would be welcomed into paradise (v. 43).

Still today, Jesus makes those who humbly receive His forgiveness a part of His kingdom.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I asked Jesus to save me from my sin? What difference will that make in the remainder of my life?

e Jesus Dies on the Cross (23:44–49)

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. —Luke 23:46

Some unusual things occurred during the crucifixion. At noon, after Jesus had hung on the cross for about three hours (compare Mark 15:25), an oppressive darkness covered the land. For three hours the "sun stopped shining" (Luke 23:45). The Greek word Luke used comes from the verb *ekleipo*, from which we get "eclipse," but this could not have been an eclipse. It would have been impossible for a solar eclipse to have occurred during the Passover, when there was a full moon. Most

likely, Luke meant dense storm clouds blocked out the sun, which gave the appearance of an eclipse.

Jesus had come as light into the world (John 1:4–5, 9). Now wicked men were trying to extinguish that light by putting Him to death. This great display of evil elicited God’s wrath, and He shrouded the land in darkness as a picture of the spiritual darkness in the hearts of the people.

Another unusual event offered a picture of something more encouraging. God ripped the curtain in the temple from top to bottom. This curtain separated the holy place from the most holy place. Only the high priest could go beyond the curtain into the presence of God. And he could do that only once a year: on the Day of Atonement.

The torn curtain is a sign that on the cross Jesus opened the way to God. Sinners now have direct access to God through Jesus, our great High Priest (Heb. 10:19–22).

Jesus died with a prayer on His lips, a quotation from Psalm 31:5 (Luke 23:46a). It was a prayer of trust and confidence in God during a storm or some adversity. Carrying the world’s sins, Jesus faced the darkest moments of His life. He faced death alone, deserted by His followers and abandoned by His Father (Mark 15:34). But even at this low point, Jesus kept His confidence and trust in God. He committed His spirit into the hands of His Father.

We will sometimes feel alone, abandoned by friends, perhaps even forsaken by God. We can be encouraged by the knowledge

that Jesus felt that way too. His agony in Gethsemane and His loneliness on the cross can be a source of strength for us when we face struggles. Because He faced the same kinds of trials we face and still triumphed, we can receive strength to overcome our trials.

Ask Yourself . . . When have I felt alone and abandoned? How does Jesus help me through those times?

The circumstances of Jesus’ death and the way He died made an impression on many who witnessed the crucifixion. The Roman centurion in charge admitted, “Surely this was a righteous man” (Luke 23:47). And others went away pounding their chests, an expression of deep remorse or grief (v. 48).

Among the eyewitnesses were some of Jesus’ followers—mostly women from Galilee (v. 49). They watched from a distance, either out of fear or to protect Jesus’ privacy.

Luke 23:50–56 in Brief

A member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea, asked for permission to take Jesus’ body. Another member of the council, Nicodemus, helped Joseph (John 19:39). Together they prepared Jesus’ body for burial and placed the body in Joseph’s own unused tomb. After the burial some of the women went home to prepare additional spices and embalming perfumes that would finish what Nicodemus and Joseph had begun.

13

Jesus Is Resurrected!

Luke 24

a The Tomb Is Empty (24:1–12)

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. —Luke 24:2–3

The resurrection is the central fact of human history. Christ's church has persisted through the centuries in spite of persecution because it is built on the reality of the resurrection. The resurrection provides us with proof that Jesus is indeed who He claimed to be: the Son of God, the Savior, and our returning King.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had prepared Jesus' body in the traditional way (John 19:39–40). But some of Jesus' followers—women from Galilee—wanted to honor Him in a personal way. After the Sabbath (which ended Saturday at sunset), they bought spices to anoint His body (Mark 16:1). Then early Sunday morning the women headed for the tomb. They knew where to go because they had watched Jesus' burial (Luke 23:55).

When the women arrived at the tomb, the first sign of something unusual was that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb's opening. Going inside, they were even more shocked to discover that Jesus' body was gone.

While the women were wondering about this, two men in shining clothes—angels (see Luke 24:23)—appeared. They asked the women why they were looking in a tomb for someone who is alive (v. 5b).

That question could be asked of those today who still look for Jesus among the dead. Many think He was nothing more than a great teacher. They think He's still in the grave, a dead hero of history. Others study about Him in books but never encounter Him personally or develop a relationship with Him. Jesus, however, is more than a good example from history. He's alive today!

Ask Yourself . . . How do I know Jesus is alive today?

The angels gave the women incredible news: "He is not here; he has risen!" (v. 6). The angels encouraged the women to remember what Jesus had said in Galilee

The entrance to a tomb near Jerusalem.



before traveling to Jerusalem. He had said that He would be crucified and raised to life on the third day (see 9:22). As the angels talked, the women began to remember Jesus' words.

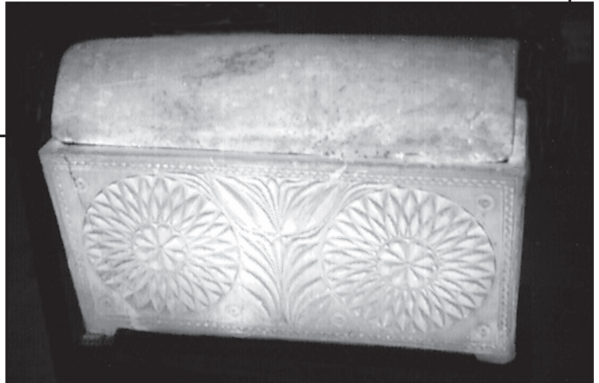
Luke provided the names of some of the women who were at the tomb that day (24:10). He wanted to establish credibility for his story. Those who doubt the resurrection today should consider that doubters in the first century A.D. were able to check out the story with eyewitnesses.

The disciples were doubters themselves at first. Flushed with

Laid to Rest

It was an ancient Near Eastern custom to use caves for tombs or to carve tombs out of hillsides. Each tomb was designed to hold several bodies, usually from one family. After the bodies had decomposed, the bones were collected and placed in stone boxes (called "bone chests" or "ossuaries") to make room for other bodies. In contrast, Jesus' body was put into a tomb that had never been used.

A large circular stone rested in a groove in front of the opening of many tombs. The stone could be rolled over the opening to keep animals out.



Near Eastern ossuary

Who Went to the Tomb?

“The women” who “went to the tomb” (Luke 24:1) were the same women Luke identified as eyewitnesses of the crucifixion: “the women who had followed him from Galilee” (23:49; also v. 55). A careful historian, Luke named those women in 24:10.

Combining Luke’s list with lists in the other Gospels, it appears that these were the first eyewitnesses to the resurrection:

- Mary Magdalene (in all accounts).
- Joanna (in Luke). In Luke 8:3 she is identified as “the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household.”
- Mary the mother of James and Joses (in Mark and Luke). She probably was the wife of Clopas (see John 19:25).
- Salome (in Mark). Most likely, she was the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John (Matt. 20:20; 27:56). Also, she may have been the sister of Jesus’ mother (John 19:25).
- “The others with them” (Luke 24:10). So at least six women—and probably more than that—went to the tomb at dawn on that first Easter Sunday.

excitement, the women returned to the city to tell them what they had seen and heard. But the disciples did not believe. The women’s enthusiasm seemed like nonsense to them—like the crazy babbling of someone hallucinating with a fever (v. 11).

As usual, Peter was the first to react. He ran to the tomb to see for himself. John outran Peter and reached the tomb first, but he waited for Peter before going in (John 20:3–6). Inside, Peter saw the empty graveclothes but still could not bring himself to believe. He was not yet capable of realizing what had taken place.

Ask Yourself . . . What was the best news I ever heard? How long did it take me to believe it?

b Christ Appears to Two Disciples (24:13–24)

As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. —Luke 24:15–16

In all, the Bible records eleven appearances of the resurrected Christ, but there may have been others (Acts 1:3). The first one Luke wrote about was the risen Lord’s encounter with two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

These two disciples were talking about what had happened to Jesus.

No doubt they were disappointed and depressed. Their conversation was interrupted by a wonderful opportunity: Jesus came up and joined in their discussion. But they didn't recognize Him.

Some Bible students think they never really got a good look at Him as they walked toward the west, perhaps into a sinking sun (see Luke 24:29). Others think they didn't recognize Him because they weren't expecting to see Him. Still others suggest that Jesus intentionally kept them from identifying Him so He could first explain the Scriptures to them. Luke wrote that they "were kept from recognizing him" (v. 16).

They opened their hearts to this stranger, telling Him of their confusion, their fears, and their broken dreams. Amazed that He seemed so uninformed, they recounted the story of Jesus. And they explained that the crucifixion had dashed all their hopes: "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (v. 21).

Their desires for the nation's redemption came from a misconception about the Messiah taken from selected Hebrew prophecies. Most first-century A.D. Jews looked for the Messiah to come as a political hero who would deliver their nation from Roman rule and reestablish the throne of David. They knew about the glory, but they didn't see the suffering of the Messiah.

When we focus on only part of Scripture, we take a great risk. Many have been sidetracked or caught up in cults or false teachings because of a limited view of God's Word. How important it is to study all of Scripture,

Identifying the **EMMAUS DISCIPLES**

One of the disciples Jesus encountered on the road to Emmaus was named Cleopas. All attempts to identify him further have been unsuccessful. He apparently was a faithful follower of Jesus, for he was present with the disciples in the upper room when the women reported on their trip to the empty tomb (Luke 24:23).

We have no information at all on the other disciple. Possibly this person was Cleopas's wife, since it appears they lived at the same place (vv. 28–29). But it is also possible that Cleopas's traveling companion was his son, his brother, or his friend.

Emmaus has not been positively located, but in Jesus' time it was about seven miles (possibly northwest) from Jerusalem.

not just selected portions!

Ask Yourself . . . What can I do to set aside preconceived notions before I read God's Word?

The two Emmaus disciples continued their story. Just that morning they had heard startling news. Some women had come back from the tomb claiming that Jesus' body was gone and the tomb was empty. The women had said they had seen a vision of angels, who had announced that Jesus was not dead but alive.

Additionally, the Emmaus disciples told Jesus about Peter and John's visit to the empty tomb. But those disciples had not seen Jesus Himself.

C Christ Makes Himself Known (24:25–35)

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"
—Luke 24:32

Jesus spoke to the two disciples with some sadness. They were foolish, He said, and "slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (v. 25). Their understanding was incomplete—they knew only one side of the Messiah's story. So as Jesus walked with them, He walked them through the Scriptures, explaining how the events of the past few days had been prophesied.

They began to understand, and hope sparked within them. They felt

as though their hearts were on fire with new life (see v. 32). Because they opened their hearts to Christ, He opened their understanding.

When we struggle with confusion or grief, we should open ourselves up to the Lord. He can soothe our distress and help us regain balance in our lives.

Ask Yourself . . . How often do I tell the Lord my worries and fears? How can I open up my heart more to Him?

The three travelers soon reached Emmaus. But since it was late in the afternoon, the two disciples insisted that Jesus stay the night with them.

When they sat together to eat the evening meal, Jesus broke the bread and gave thanks for it. In that moment, "their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (v. 31). We can only guess what triggered their recognition. Was it the way Jesus prayed for the meal? Did they suddenly recall how He had broken bread for the five thousand? Did they see the nail scars in His hands?

As soon as they knew who Jesus was, He disappeared (v. 31). Though it was late, they couldn't wait to tell the disciples back in Jerusalem what had happened. They hurried out into the night, prepared to hike seven miles through darkness. When we encounter the living Christ, we have important news to tell. We want to tell others what we have experienced.

When the Emmaus disciples arrived in Jerusalem, the others were talking about another appearance of the risen Christ. Peter had seen

Resurrection Appearances

Event	Time	Reference
At empty tomb	Early Sunday morning	Matt. 26:1–10 Mark 16:1–8 Luke 24:1–2; John 20:1–9
To Mary Magdalene at empty tomb	Early Sunday morning	Mark 16:9–11 John 20:11–18
On road to Emmaus	Midday Sunday	Luke 24:13–32
To Peter in Jerusalem	During the day on Sunday	Luke 24:34 1 Cor. 15:5
To ten disciples in upper room	Sunday evening	Mark 16:14 Luke 24:36–43 John 20:19–25
To the disciples in upper room	One week later	John 20:26–31 1 Cor. 15:5
To seven disciples fishing at Galilee	One day at daybreak	John 21:1–23
To eleven disciples on mountain in Galilee	Some time later	Matt. 28:16–20 Mark 16:15–18
To more than 500	Some time later	1 Cor. 15:6
To James	Some time later	1 Cor. 15:7
At Mount of Olives	Forty days after Resurrection	Luke 24:44–49 Acts 1:3–8

Jesus. We don't know any details of Jesus' visit to Peter, but it is fascinating to realize that the one who denied the Lord was one of the first Jesus wanted to see.

d Christ Enlightens His Disciples (24:36–49)

“You are witnesses of these things.”
—Luke 24:48

As the disciples talked excitedly about the latest developments, Jesus stood in the room with them. They were shocked by His sudden appearance and thought they were seeing a ghost—probably because the doors to the room were locked (John 20:19). No ordinary person could pass through locked doors!

Jesus was raised to life with a resurrected body—a glorified body. But He did have a body; He was not merely a spirit being. “Look at

my hands and my feet,” He said. “Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have” (Luke 24:39).

Jesus wanted to calm His disciples’ fears by convincing them He was not a ghost. He showed them the marks left by the nails in His hands and feet. The disciples saw Him with their eyes, but they couldn’t believe what they were seeing. It was too incredible—too good to be true! So Jesus asked for something to eat, and by eating a piece of fish gave them proof that He was indeed not a ghost.

Jews often came to agreements and settled their disputes over a meal. Some think this means of reconciliation may have been part of the reason why Jesus ate with His disciples after the resurrection. He wanted to reassure them that though they had abandoned Him before the crucifixion, their relationship was still intact.

Jesus reminded His followers that He had already told them how the Scriptures had to be fulfilled. The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms—the three sections of the Hebrew Scriptures—reveal things about the Messiah that had to occur: He had to suffer before He could rise from the dead on the third day as the everliving sacrifice for sins. Also, the prophets had said the Messiah would not just be a Savior for Jerusalem, but for the whole world.

Jesus told the disciples that they were called to be witnesses to these things. But how could such

ordinary individuals take on such an awesome responsibility? How could they hope to accomplish the task? Jesus promised to send them the power they would need. If they would wait for the Holy Spirit, they would receive the power to be witnesses (vv. 48–49; compare Acts 1:8). On their own, they could not witness for the Lord, but the Holy Spirit could witness through them.

Waiting must not have been easy for them. Sometimes God puts us in a position where we feel as though we’re wasting time. We might feel we’re accomplishing nothing and are totally unproductive. But amazingly, these often are the times God uses to develop us and to prepare us. It’s in the waiting periods of life that He fills us with His power. Without those “unproductive” times, we would never be able to fulfill His call to be productive. We have to wait in weakness before we can act in power.

When finally the Holy Spirit’s power came upon the believers, it was time for them to act. Sometimes we may want to lock ourselves up with the blessings of God, enjoying the fellowship of the saints. We must be careful so that after we have all we need to accomplish great things for God, we don’t get too busy enjoying great things from God to carry out our task.

Ask Yourself . . . How can I know when it is time to wait and when it is time to work?

e Christ Returns to Heaven (24:50–53)

While [Jesus] was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.
—Luke 24:51

Forty days after the resurrection (Acts 1:3), Jesus led His disciples out to the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:50; Acts 1:12). He blessed them and then was taken up into heaven, an event called the ascension.

The disciples watched spellbound as Jesus ascended until they could no longer see Him. Then they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem full of joy. We know from Acts 1:13 that they were staying in the upper room. So when Luke says “they stayed continually at the temple” (Luke 24:53), he meant they went to the temple at the regular times for prayer (see Acts 3:1).

Why did Jesus leave the earth in such a dramatic fashion? We may never know for sure, but some Bible students think it was important for

His earthly ministry to come to a definite conclusion. The disciples needed to experience a specific point in time when Jesus returned to heaven. Also, by leaving this earth, Jesus was in a position to release the Holy Spirit to minister through all believers everywhere (John 16:7).

The Lord Jesus is now seated at the right hand of His Father (Eph. 1:20). He is our “advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1) and our high priest (Heb. 7:26). In addition, Jesus is preparing a place for us to join Him someday (John 14:2–3).

The ascension was more than the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry. It was also a springboard for the disciples’ ministry. Seeing their Lord go up into the clouds must have encouraged them to be faithful to His commission (Luke 24:47–48). As the years went by and they recalled the sight of His departure, they must have been thrilled to know He would be returning in the same way (Acts 1:11).

Ask Yourself . . . Am I expectantly looking for the risen Christ’s return?

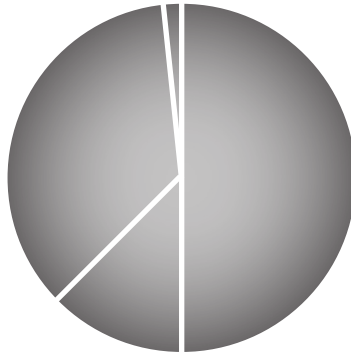
Sources for Luke's Gospel

Luke has much of the same material in his Gospel that is included in Matthew's and Mark's Gospels. One explanation for this repetition is that Luke and Matthew both used Mark's Gospel and a no longer existing document (called Q—from the German word *quelle*, which means "source") as their primary sources. But Luke also relied on oral accounts, written records that were circulating in his day, and his

own careful investigation to supply additional material (Luke 1:3). That Luke used a variety of sources does not diminish the value of his Gospel. In fact, this diversity probably enriches his Gospel. Acting under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke pulled together from many sources a comprehensive, accurate, and reliable account of Jesus' life and teachings.

**In Common with
Mark Only:
22 Verses**
(2 percent of the book)

**In Common with
Both Matthew
and Mark:
407 Verses**
(36 percent
of the book)



**Unique to Luke:
583 Verses**
(50 percent
of the book)

**In Common with
Matthew Only:
137 Verses**
(12 percent of the book)

Jesus' Parables

LUKE

MATTHEW

MARK

JOHN

Old Patches on New Garments

5:36

9:16

2:21

New Wine in Old Wineskins

5:37-38

9:17

2:22

Tree and Its Fruit

6:43-45

7:15-20

Wise and Foolish Builders

6:47-49

7:24-27

Moneylender

7:41-43

Sower

8:5-8, 11-15

13:3-8, 18-23

4:3-8, 14-20

Lamp on a Stand

8:16; 11:33

5:14-15

4:21-22

Good Samaritan

10:30-37

Friend in Need

11:5-8

Rich Fool

12:16-21

Ravens and Lilies

12:22-31

6:25-34

Watchful Servants

12:35-40

13:35-37

Faithful and Wise Servant

12:42-48

24:45-51

Unfruitful Fig Tree

13:6-9

Mustard Seed

13:18-19

13:31-32

4:30-32

Yeast

13:20-21

13:33

Lowest Seat at the Feast

14:7-14

LUKE**MATTHEW****MARK****JOHN****Great Banquet**

14:16–24

Cost of Discipleship

14:28–33

Salt

14:34–35

5:13

9:50

Lost Sheep

15:4–7

18:12–14

Lost Coin

15:8–10

Lost (Prodigal) Son

15:11–32

Shrewd Manager

16:1–8

Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19–31

Master and Servant

17:7–10

Persistent Widow

18:2–8

Pharisee and Tax Collector

18:10–14

Ten Minas

19:12–27

25:14–30

Tenants of the Vineyard

20:9–18

21:33–44

12:1–11

Fig Tree

21:29–31

24:32–35

13:28–29

Hidden Treasure

13:44

Weeds

13:24–30, 36–43

Pearl of Great Value

13:45–46

Fishing Net

13:47–50

LUKE

MATTHEW

MARK

JOHN

Owner of House

13:52

Unmerciful Servant

18:23–34

Workers of the Vineyard

20:1–16

Two Sons

21:28–32

Wedding Banquet

22:2–14

Ten Virgins

25:1–13

Sheep and Goats

25:31–46

Growing Seeds

4:26–29

Harvest

4:35–38

Water

4:10–14; 7:37–39

Bread

6:26–35

Shepherd and His Sheep

10:1–16

Kernel of Wheat

12:24

Vine and Branches

15:1–17

Art Credits

Maps © 1993 Magellan GeographixSM Santa Barbara, Calif. (pp. 49, 79, 97). Illustrations by Caffy Whitney (pp. 12, 26, 28, 33, 37, 38, 43, 52, 54, 59, 64, 66, 72, 83, 86, 93, 99); Gustave Dore (p. 16). Photographs by Darko Tepert Donatus (pg. 10); F. Perlberg (Friedrich Perlberg, 1848–1921) Public Domain (pg. 11); BobWC/Getty (pg. 18); Diego Delso (pg. 21); Zairon (pg. 23); Almog (pg. 25); Zeromancer44 (pg. 35); Avram Graicer (pg. 40); Dr. Avishai Teicher (pg. 45); Deror avi (pg. 56); Utilisateur:Djampa (pg. 79); CNG coins (pg. 86); Ian Scott (pg. 91); London, Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd (pg. 93); www.biblewalks.com/Rotem (pg. 94); compuinfoto/Getty (pg. 100); Paul Arps (pg. 104).

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE®

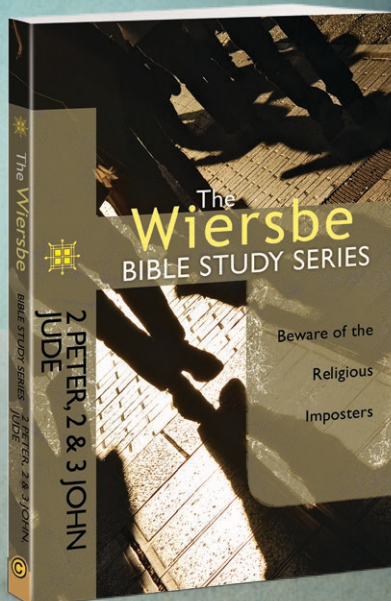
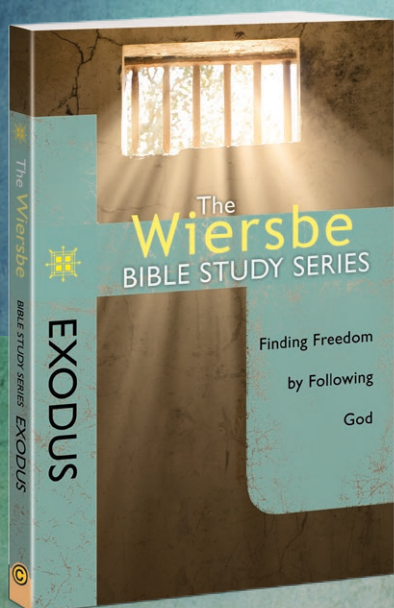
is organized according to a systematic, sensible plan that will take you through every book of the Bible.

	SEPTEMBER	DECEMBER	MARCH	JUNE
2022/23	Philippians, Colossians	Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther	Revelation	Ezekiel, Daniel
2023/24	Mark	Psalms	Galatians, Ephesians	Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs
2024/25	Acts	Genesis	1, 2 Thessalonians, Jude	Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah
2025/26	Luke	Exodus	1 Corinthians	Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
2026/27	Hebrews	Joshua	2 Corinthians	Isaiah
2027/28	Matthew	Judges, Ruth	1, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon	Jeremiah, Lamentations
2028/29	Romans	1, 2 Samuel	1, 2 Peter	Nah., Zeph., Hab., Obad., Hag., Zech., Mal.
2029/30	John	1, 2 Kings, 1, 2 Chronicles	James 1, 2, 3 John	Proverbs

© 2025 David C Cook

Next quarter:
Exodus

THE BEST OF WARREN WIERSBE



BE SERIES BIBLE STUDIES

Experience the life-changing, relevant truths of Scripture wrapped in the warm, personal insights of Warren Wiersbe. The Wiersbe Bible Study Series provides:

- Stories and illustrations that encourage students to think outside the box
- Interactive questions that go deep into God's Word and promote fellowship with others
- Application questions that allow each person to respond personally and intimately
- Flexibility to fit each leader's needs—with a choice of length, depth, and pace

Additional studies available at DavidCCook.com

Contact a David C Cook rep at **800.323.7543**
or visit your local Christian Bookstore.

DAVID C COOK
transforming lives together

A Adult
UTB Study Book
No. 1092