

# *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*

By

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

This commentary is based upon my personal devotional notes and reflections on the Gospel of Luke. It is intended to help you better understand some of the background and issues in Luke's gospel. It is not a technical commentary designed for academic projects. This material is intended for use by members and friends of Southside Christian Church, especially our small group leaders to help you lead your group in a verse by verse study of the gospel. However, I do not include discussion questions in the commentary. That I leave up to you as a group leader.

A few things need to be noted. There are occasional references to the original Greek words Luke used in a particular passage. Those Greek words are always quoted in italics and are transliterated into English from the Greek. I go chapter by chapter in the commentary and sometimes individual verses are commented upon, sometimes it is several sentences and sometimes a whole paragraph. This commentary is based on the New International Version and all Scripture quotations are taken from that version of the Bible. It should also be noted that I owe many of my own insights in Luke's gospel to Dr. Ken Bailey a professor of mine at Fuller Theological Seminary and one of the world's leading scholars on the parables of Jesus and the Middle Eastern cultural background of the New Testament.

I hope and pray you will find this resource useful for your own study and also for your small group. I also hope that it will help grow your love and respect for God's Word, the Bible and help motivate you to study it more so that you may come to know its author, our Lord Jesus Christ!

*Pastor Galen Doughty*

## **Brief Outline of Luke:**

Prologue – *1:1-4*

The Infancy Narratives – *1:5-2:52*

The Ministry of John the Baptist – *3:1-20*

The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry – *3:21-4:13*

Jesus in Galilee – *4:14-9:50*

On the Way to Jerusalem (The Travel Narrative) – *9:51-19:27*

Jesus in Jerusalem – *19:28-21:38*

The Passion of Jesus (arrest, trial, crucifixion, death and burial) – *22:1-23:56*

The Resurrection of Jesus – *24:1-53*

## **Chapter 1:**

**Luke 1:1** - Luke is the only gospel writer that gives us clues into how he wrote his gospel and the sources he used for his writing. He is not an eyewitness but was a companion of Paul that joined the apostle on his second missionary journey. He was a Greek from Philippi or Troas who was also a physician. Luke is one of the only ones with Paul during his imprisonment in Caesarea and in Rome. Since he was a physician it is reasonable to assume he took care of Paul during his

trials. Paul hints at the fact that he had some debilitating, chronic disease or medical condition in Galatians and 2 Corinthians. Luke might have stayed near him to help him deal with his condition and the rigors of imprisonment.

Luke was with Paul when he came to Jerusalem for the final time. Acts suggests he was also with Paul through his two year imprisonment in Caesarea. It is possible that during that time Luke begins his research into writing a gospel and interviews many of the eyewitnesses who were living in Palestine during this time. He probably talked with Phillip the Deacon who lived in Caesarea and perhaps some from the household of Cornelius. During that two year period he most likely talked with Mary if she was still in Judea or Galilee at the time, gathering his material for his birth narratives. The early accounts of Jesus' life almost certainly have Mary as their primary source. Nothing else makes sense.

Luke states very clearly that he was not the first person to write an account of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Two references from Paul's letters help corroborate Luke's testimony.

*Colossians 4:10*: Mark is now with Paul in Rome. That puts Mark in Rome at least by 60 and possible as early as 58. Luke also is with Paul. That means Mark and Luke knew each other and almost certainly were comparing notes in regards to the accounts of Jesus each was writing. Was Peter in Rome already too? Had Mark already finished his gospel? Did he show a draft to Luke, who then used it in his gospel as well? We don't know the details but the clues are fascinating and give us a picture of how the gospels came to be written. God not only inspired the writers he was in the details of the gathering of their sources. The fact that Mark and Luke met in Rome during Paul's imprisonment is significant!

*Philemon 24*: Mark and Luke are together in Rome with Paul around 60-62. It cannot be coincidence that Luke writes of the many who undertook a gospel or that the two gospel writers were together or that Luke borrowed heavily from Mark as a source and outline for his gospel! What conversations did they have with each other, with Paul or even Peter if he was now in Rome? We will never know but the clues suggest that Mark was written before Acts was finished which means his gospel was written as early as 58 or 60 before Paul arrived with Luke in Rome.

**1:2** - Luke uses the phrase, eyewitnesses and servants of the word. The Greek word is *huperates*, which means attendant, servant, and literally assistant rower, because it comes from the verb to row a boat. It was used of the synagogue attendant who was the bouncer, janitor and keeper of the Scripture scrolls. He was the chief assistant to the president of the synagogue. Here the *huperates* is the keeper of the Word of Jesus and was also an eyewitness. They were the keepers of the tradition of the Jewish-Christian synagogues, those who followed Jesus as their Messiah. They would insure that the words and deeds of Jesus were preserved correctly and were rightly recited when they were shared in the synagogue. They were the keys to the identity and survival of the Jewish-Christian synagogues because they helped preserve the identity of who the people were, who their Messiah was and what he did and said. Without them stories could too easily have been made up or changed too radically and the life and ministry of Jesus would have been lost which would have led to the destruction of the Jewish-Christian community. Those synagogues were a key part in accurately preserving the tradition of what Jesus said and did and the meaning of it all. They used the cultural tools they knew to pass down orally what Jesus did until it could be written down and preserved for people outside Judea. That is what Luke was doing and that is why he used the *huperates* as one of his primary sources.

**1:3** - Luke says he carefully investigated everything from the beginning. He begins his gospel with the birth announcement of John the Baptist, going back further than Mark, and even further than Matthew. The careful investigation implies his interviews with eyewitnesses and his gathering of source materials, perhaps sayings of Jesus or even the *"Travel Narrative"* (Luke 9:51-19:27). The most likely time he gathered this material was during Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea where Luke would have had access to Jewish Christians who knew Jesus and the Messianic Jewish synagogues where Jesus' sayings and deeds were recited and remembered.

Luke was led through his investigation to write down an account as well for his mentor and probably for the many Greek speaking Christians in the Gentile churches of Asia Minor and Greece. What finally led him to decide to write a gospel we cannot say, except to note that the Holy Spirit was active in his investigations and his decision to write his gospel.

Theophilus was probably his patron who underwrote the expense of Luke's writing and publishing. He was a Christian and probably a Roman official, which explains the honorific title, most excellent or your Excellency. His name means lover of God, which could be a code name for a more well-known Roman official. Luke might have used Theophilus as a cover to hide the identity of a Roman Christian who needed to be careful of being so public in his faith given the situation with Nero and his increasing paranoia and opposition to Christians.

**1:4** - Luke tells Theophilus he writes so that Theophilus will know the certainty of what he had been taught. In other words Luke writes to show Theophilus that these are not myths he has believed. Jesus was a real historical figure who lived, died and rose again. He is truly the Lord of all and our Savior. We can have complete confidence that the stories of the gospels are true. He writes to convince Theophilus and his readers that Jesus is who he claimed to be, the Son of God and that the invitation of forgiveness that he extends to all who believe is real and true.

**1:5-10** - Luke begins his narrative with the birth announcement of John the Baptist. He introduces us to Zechariah a priest who was of the priestly division of Abijah. 1 Chronicles 24 describes the process where the priests by family groups were divided into their divisions in order to know whose turn it was to serve in the temple. It was all based on a rotating schedule by families. Abiathar was a son of Ithamar son of Aaron. He was eighth in line for the rotation. The point is there was nothing out of the ordinary about Zechariah. He was a priest in the normal temple service rotation. He probably lived in a nearby town in Judea and traveled to Jerusalem when it was time for his service, staying in the temple until his ministry was finished.

Luke tells us Elizabeth his wife was also a descendant of Aaron, which meant she was of a priestly family as well, but she was barren. In that time that would have been seen as a curse from God upon them. It would have been common for people to believe either they sinned or their parents did and that was the reason Elizabeth could not have children. Luke counteracts that idea by saying they were both upright before God, observing all the Lord's commandments blamelessly. They were now advancing in years and the implication is Elizabeth is past her childbearing years.

Luke sets the time of John's birth announcement in the reign of King Herod of Judea. That puts it sometime before 4 BC.

Zechariah goes into the temple to serve because it was his division's turn to serve and the lot had fallen to him. His task that day was to burn incense and offer prayers at the altar of incense before the veil of the holy of holies in the holy place of the temple. The worshippers had gathered outside in the court where the sacrifices were performed as Zechariah went into the

temple to perform his duties. This was probably either at the morning or evening sacrifice and prayers. Zechariah goes in to pray while the people pray outside. He is apparently the only priest in the holy place.

**1:11-17** - Zechariah is performing his duties, offering prayers before the altar of incense, when an angel of the Lord suddenly appears right next to the altar of incense. Zechariah is naturally startled and afraid. The angel immediately calms him and tells him not to be afraid.

He then tells Zechariah that Elizabeth is going to become pregnant and have a son. He tells him they are to name him John. He will bring them joy and will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is not to drink wine or any other fermented drink and will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth or his mother's womb. The Nazarite vow of Numbers 6 includes the stipulation of no alcohol but also speaks about not shaving the sideburns or touching anything dead. It is possible that John was to be a Nazarite from birth or something similar. When the angel says he is to be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth that was a signal that something extraordinary was going to happen. Prophets and kings were filled with the Spirit. He only came on people with special callings.

Then the angel describes John's life and mission. He will bring the people back to the Lord their God in the Spirit and power of Elijah. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and prepare a people for the Lord. Gabriel basically quotes from Malachi 4 and the last prophecy of the Old Testament. Before the Messiah comes God will send the Elijah prophet to turn his people back to him and prepare for the Messiah. Zechariah could not have mistaken what the angel was telling him. Elizabeth was going to bear the Elijah prophet in preparation for the Messiah and they were to name him John. That was not a family name and so would have seemed odd to name him. It was God's name that he chose for his prophet and forerunner of his Messiah.

**1:18** - Zechariah expresses his doubts about the angel's message. How can I be sure of this, in other words how can I know what you tell me is true? He doesn't say with Mary, how can this be, but how can I trust your message! It is a natural question, especially after 400 years of silence and no prophetic word to Israel. The Jews had been waiting for the Messiah with increasing fervor, and they knew the prophecies that the Elijah prophet would have to come first. Perhaps Zechariah is like us. We all know God has to choose someone to carry out his plans. Someone had to be the parents of John. Zechariah just doesn't understand why God would pick him and Elizabeth! I don't even think this is like Moses; Lord please choose someone else. I think it is simple incredulity. You want to pick me? How can I be sure of this?

**1:19-20** - The angel identifies himself as Gabriel, the angel who was sent to Daniel to tell him God's answers to his prayers. He describes himself as the one who stands in the presence of Yahweh. He has been sent to speak with Zechariah and tell him what is to come. Jewish intertestamental literature names him as one of the four archangels (Michael, Sariel or Uriel, Raphael and Gabriel). Zechariah was probably familiar with the apocryphal writings and perhaps even Jewish apocalyptic because he was a priest and would have studied in the temple. When he heard the name Gabriel he definitely would have recognized it. In fact it may have made him all the more fearful because now he has questioned one of the archangels of God!

It almost seems like Gabriel is a little mad at Zechariah for questioning him. Maybe he's not used to that! He says I'm trying to give you good news and you doubt it! Ok, you won't be

able to speak until your son is born because you did not believe the words I spoke to you! Gabriel gives Zechariah a sign that his message is true but it is also a punishment for unbelief. It's almost like he is saying, doubt me will you, ok you can't talk until everything I told you happens as I said it would.

**1:21-25** - The people were outside praying and waiting for Zechariah to emerge from the holy place. They start to wonder why he was taking so long when he finally emerges but cannot speak. Zechariah makes signs to the crowd so they understand he has seen a vision in the temple. This would have been out of the ordinary but not completely unexpected. He was after all in the presence of the Lord where only the priests could go. The temple and its rituals might have been familiar to the Jews but they were still dealing with Yahweh who was mysterious and wonderful. Anything might happen when people came in contact with God!

Zechariah heads home after his service is up and Elizabeth gets pregnant. She remains in seclusion for five months probably to make sure she is pregnant and not to do anything that might jeopardize the baby. She sees it as the Lord's blessing and that he has removed her shame at not being able to bear children. She sees her pregnancy as God's favor and grace to her.

The five months of seclusion set up the time reference in v.26, in the sixth month. It was the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

The birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and Elizabeth is very much in the same vein as Isaac to Abraham and Sarah and Samuel to Hannah and Elkanah. This is an Old Testament miracle of conception when it appeared impossible. In fact these first few chapters of Luke read much like Samuel, Judges and Kings, as if the Old Testament times were being wrapped up and a new way of God's dealing with his people is about to come to pass. Prophecy is being fulfilled, the Messiah is coming.

**1:26-27** - The sixth month refers to Elizabeth's pregnancy. Gabriel is sent to Mary when Elizabeth is six months pregnant with John the Baptist. He goes to a town in Galilee called Nazareth. We now know from archeological diggings there that Nazareth was a village of about 400 in Jesus' time. Thus it would have been a tightknit community where everyone would know everyone else. Betrothals would have been arranged and the whole village would have known it. Nothing was secret in a small town like that.

Mary was betrothed to Joseph a man who was of the house of David. Joseph would have known his ancestry and it would have been a source of family pride but it meant little in the larger scheme of things. The Davidic line had long since lost its power and though there was the hope of the Messiah no one in Nazareth or anywhere else put any stock in the fact that Joseph the carpenter was descended from David. No one that is accept God! He and Mary were betrothed which is more than an engagement and less than a marriage. Legally she now belonged to him and was his wife but they would not consummate the marriage until their wedding which usually was a year after the betrothal. The gospels tell us that Joseph was from Nazareth too which means Mary had known him for much of her life. People did not move in and out of a village like Nazareth. Mary was also a virgin, which meant she was a young teenage girl, probably around 14 or 15 and no more than 16 years old. She was probably a freshman in high school by our standards.

Nazareth was simply a small first century village in Galilee, a region of mixed peoples with many Greeks living there but predominantly still Jewish. Sephoris, a large and cosmopolitan city was nearby and if Joseph was a carpenter or day laborer he probably had

plenty of work to do in the region. The town would have had a synagogue and a rabbi where the people would gather to worship and read the Scriptures. Nazareth would have been a quiet town in Galilee that was on no one's radar as having anything significant to do with the great events of the time. As a carpenter, Joseph would have known a craft and worked with his hands. He made a living wage but was not rich by any means. Life would be hard. He was probably looking forward to marriage and a family so he could pass on his trade to his sons which is probably how he learned it himself, from his father.

**1:28-29** - Gabriel comes to Mary and appears to her and gives her a greeting that confuses and troubles Mary. What did he mean, favored one and the Lord is with you? Mary, in looking at her life, probably wondered how the angel could consider her a favorite of God. Her reaction says much about her humble spirit and nature. By Gabriel's answer, telling her not to be afraid, his greeting and sudden appearance probably frightened her too.

When Gabriel comes to Daniel he is so frightened by him he faints. Zechariah in the temple is startled and afraid. Now Gabriel comes to Mary and has to reassure her she does not need to be afraid. Everyone Gabriel appeared to he had to tell don't be afraid. His appearance and the mode of his appearing must have been a terrifying experience for everyone he met!

**1:30-33** - Gabriel gives Mary the news he was sent to deliver. She is to be the mother of the Messiah! She had found favor with God. The word is grace, *charin*. In later years Mary may have wondered if grace was the right word for Gabriel to use that day. He tells her she is going to be pregnant and have a son and she is to name him Jesus. I am not sure but I think the naming of children was the father's prerogative not the mother's. Jesus will be his name, Joshua or Yeshua in Hebrew, God saves. Matthew explains that he will save his people from their sins. He will be the Savior.

Gabriel tells Mary he will be great and will be called the Son of God and the Lord will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over Israel forever. The language here is unmistakable; Jesus will be the Messiah. He will bring the Kingdom of God as all the prophets wrote centuries before. The long awaited Messiah is about to be born and Mary will be his mother! That is what Gabriel has been sent to tell Mary. God's long planned salvation for his people is about to happen and Mary will be at the center of it!

**1:34-37** - Mary asks a very pertinent question: how can this happen since I am a virgin? Her question also hints at the fact that her wedding was still some time off and that she had only been recently betrothed to Joseph. Mary's question is one of confusion unlike Zechariah's question which is one of doubt. I haven't ever been with a man so how can I get pregnant? She is not thinking virgin birth at all!

Gabriel then describes the virgin birth or virgin conception. This will be the Holy Spirit's doing and he will come upon you and overshadow you and cause you to become pregnant without a man. Jesus will be the seed of the woman in Genesis 3 who will bruise the serpent's head. Gabriel doesn't explain any more about the process of how God conceived Jesus in Mary's womb. Perhaps there was no way to do it and even we with our medical knowledge would not completely understand it. Later New Testament writers would say that Jesus was both God and human in one person; two natures in one man, the God-man. Somehow God put them both into Jesus when the Son of God was formed in a teenager's womb. It is a mystery so profound that Gabriel describes the child as holy and he will be called the Son of God.

It is almost impossible to fathom how the Almighty Creator who spoke the universe into being could shrink down and become a zygote and an embryo inside of Mary. Mary too must have wondered how it was all possible. As if in answer Gabriel gives Mary the news about her cousin Elizabeth, that she is now six months pregnant. Then he adds the great line, for nothing is impossible with God! God can do what no one else can do. Yet God chooses to use human beings and work through them on this planet. So he chooses to become a human himself to save us and he chooses to use a humble village carpenter and a young teenage girl who has lived a sheltered village life to work out his mighty plan. It is beyond anything we could have imagined and yet God said so as well. Who would have believed what we have heard, Isaiah writes. Who indeed; but nothing is impossible with God!

**1:38** - This is the greatest line in the whole story. Mary accepts the Lord's will for her and accepts all the consequences of what the Lord wants to do through her. May it be to me as you have said. I am the Lord's servant. With that acceptance of God's plan Mary sets in motion the salvation of the human race, but it would cost her. She will have to endure the scandal of getting pregnant without having been with Joseph. She accepts whatever may come with Joseph and simply trusts herself to God. She will endure sidelong glances and whispered gossip for the rest of her life about Jesus because that is what happens in small villages in Galilee where everyone knows everyone else's business. She knows nothing of the wide world outside her home, yet Mary becomes in that moment one of the greatest people in the world. She could have hardly understood the cost of saying yes to herself let alone the burden she would bear for the rest of her days in being the mother of the Messiah, yet she takes it on. All the joy and the pain she embraces in her answer. If she had already found favor with God he must have smiled at that moment, knowing his choice had been the right one. The Catholics venerate Mary so much it borders on worship. She almost becomes a sort of demi-goddess and go between for us and Jesus. The Protestants do not honor her enough. Perhaps it is because she is a woman, yet no woman had more impact on the plan of God for the salvation of the world than this humble teenager from Nazareth. Her humility was her strength and she was pleasing to God because of it.

Luke almost certainly learned of Gabriel's visit from Mary herself. What that meeting was like we do not know, but I think Luke also was impressed with Mary's character and could recognize that here was one whom the Lord favored indeed. Though she and Jesus at times were at odds with each other it is clear from all the gospels that Jesus loved his mother very much and was grateful for her. We should be too.

**1:39-45** - Soon after Gabriel's announcement to her Mary hurried to see Elizabeth, undoubtedly to see if the angel's story were true and to celebrate with her cousin. Did Mary go alone? I don't think so as that would have been unthinkable in the village culture she lived in. Luke does not tell us who went with her or whether it was a man or a woman. Did Mary's mother go with her to see her cousin? Again Luke gives us no details and even makes the story sound as if Mary traveled all the way from Galilee to Judea alone.

When Mary goes in to greet Elizabeth, John in his mother's womb leaps for joy. The Holy Spirit fills Elizabeth and she prophesies about Mary. She blesses Mary inspired by the Spirit and asks her why the mother of my Lord should come to visit her. Elizabeth supernaturally understands that Mary is pregnant with the Messiah. John in his mother's womb and filled with the Spirit already somehow recognizes the one he has come to announce and leaps inside

Elizabeth. She perceives it as her baby recognizing the Messiah. Mary could not have been more than a few months pregnant at this time, even allowing for delays in departure from Nazareth and the time it took someone to walk on foot all the way to Judea.

Elizabeth then blesses Mary again for believing what the Lord has said to her and that it will be accomplished. She blesses Mary for accepting her pregnancy and taking on being the mother of the Messiah. Elizabeth gives Mary two blessings in this passage. If you count John's leap inside her it is three.

**1:46-56** - The Magnificat, Mary's song which takes its name from the opening line in Latin, my soul magnifies the Lord, or praises the Lord.

Mary's song sounds like many of the Psalms including Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2. Mary must also have been inspired by the Holy Spirit at the time. Either she or Elizabeth or someone else who was present (Mary's unnamed relative who accompanied her?), remembered her words and later shared them with Luke.

Mary praises God for remembering her, a servant of the Lord. She reflects that though she is a humble village girl generations to come will call her blessed because of what God has done for her. The Magnificat reflects Mary's early understanding of her role and what her son will do. It describes the Messiah in terms such as Isaiah did about bringing justice for the poor and saving Israel from her enemies. Fittingly it is mostly about God exalting the humble such as Mary and bringing down the proud, like King Herod, though she does not name him by name. This theme of the blessing of the poor and God's justice coming against the rich who exploit them Jesus will repeat in the Sermon on the Plain. Mary closes by singing that God has remembered his covenant with Abraham to save them and bless them and make them a great nation.

Mary's song is very much in the tradition of the Old Testament Psalms and prophets. There is nothing radical here or out of the ordinary. David and his house and reign are not mentioned directly though they are alluded to.

Mary stays with Elizabeth for another three months. Elizabeth would have been ready to deliver when Mary leaves. Mary must have been around three months pregnant or a little more when she goes back home. By the time she gets to Nazareth it will be more and more difficult to hide her pregnancy and tongues will begin to wag. Who was she with when she went to visit her cousin? We know from Matthew that Joseph thought she had betrayed him and committed adultery with someone. It was not long after Mary got home that the full implications of what God had done to her began to be obvious and the burden and shame (though she had done nothing wrong) came full force against her.

**1:57-66** - Luke now returns to John and his birth. Elizabeth gives birth to a son and her neighbors celebrate with her. A barren woman was thought to be cursed of God, no matter how upright and moral she might have been. Her friends are filled with joy over Elizabeth's son because they see it as a lifting of God's curse upon her and God showing mercy to her.

When Zechariah and Elizabeth invite their friends to come to the boy's circumcision according to the Law, at eight days old, the ones who are circumcising him are going to name him after Zechariah. Who are these people? Is it the village rabbi, or other priests or family? All are possibilities. Elizabeth speaks up and says his name is John which points to the fact that women didn't have a central role in the naming of a child, especially a son. The friends or family argue that John is not a family name and is inappropriate.

Then follows the funny part. Zechariah is not deaf he just can't speak but his friends and family attending the circumcision ceremony make signs to him about what he wants to name the boy as if he can't hear as well as can't speak. It's one of those details that Luke includes that ring true of an eyewitness account and recollection of that day. Zechariah asks for a tablet to write the name and as soon as he writes down his name is John, immediately his tongue is freed and he can speak again! He begins praising God. His Benedictus is probably a summary of what he said.

The people who have gathered are startled and the news spreads throughout the hill country of Judea about what had happened. People gossip and talk about who the child will grow up to be. People would have been talking about this incident for months. Village life is dull and something like this would be told and retold for a long time. Every time Elizabeth would appear with her baby people would whisper the story and probably at every milestone in John's life growing up as well. Who was this boy going to grow up to be? Something like this doesn't happen by accident. Plus if the Benedictus is close to what Zechariah said that day his words would be electric among the villagers because he declared that John was going to be the Elijah prophet and that Messiah was coming!

**1:67-79** - The Benedictus, Zechariah's song of praise to God, named after the opening line of praise to God in Latin.

Luke says Zechariah after his tongue is freed is filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesies, something similar to what happened to Mary. This in itself besides his words would have not been lost upon the people. Prophecy had been dead for 400 years. Now suddenly Zechariah is prophesying. What was going on?

He praises God for saving his people. Zechariah claims the Messiah has been sent, which he had. The developing baby had stayed in Zechariah's house for three months! Zechariah like Mary sees the Messiah as the one who will save Israel from her enemies and from all who hate the Jews. He will show mercy to his people and remember his covenant with Abraham. God will rescue his people. This probably reflects the current thinking and hopes of the Jews of Zechariah's village and many across Judea. Zechariah's words are not wrong; they reflect much of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament, but as Luke will show the mission of the Messiah Jesus will be different than what the people had thought. He will come as God's Servant to bear the sins of the people and will save them from the greatest enemies of all, sin and death and Satan.

Zechariah then prophesies about his son, John. He declares that he will be a prophet of God. He will prepare the way for the Lord and for his Messiah. He will tell people the way to salvation and how to receive the forgiveness of God. This will be a theme in Luke's gospel. See chapter 24 and Jesus' instructions to his disciples about preaching forgiveness to all the nations beginning in Jerusalem. Zechariah then alludes to *Malachi 4:2* and the son of righteousness rising on Israel. In other words John will guide the people toward the light and away from the darkness. This he did in his ministry of forewarning and baptism of repentance. Zechariah declares that John is the Elijah prophet and forerunner of the Messiah just as Gabriel had told him in the temple nine months before. Not only would the circumstances surrounding John's birth be talked about and what happened at his circumcision but also Zechariah's prophecy and song. All together it would have given the people of John's village something to reflect upon and gossip about for years to come. They probably never tired of talking about it and speculating about what it meant. After all, one of their number was going to be famous, God had said so!

**1:80** - Luke says John grows up and became strong in spirit or perhaps strong in the Holy Spirit. He lived in the desert until the time for his public ministry. The museum at Qumran suggests that John might have joined the Qumran community. With its emphasis on purity and righteousness it might have appealed to John. We do not know, but it is an intriguing possibility. Luke's detail, that he lives in the desert fits the profile of the Elijah prophet. Elijah appeared out of the desert to bring Israel back to God. John will do the same.

Luke has established John's identity as the Elijah prophet and has moved him out to the desert until the time comes for his public ministry. Now he turns back to Jesus and his birth and early years. Luke moves his narrative along with great skill!

## **Chapter 2:**

**2:1-3** - In those days means in the days of John's birth, not his growing up and going into the desert. John and Jesus would have been around three months apart in age.

Caesar Augustus is the name Octavian took after he crushed Anthony and Cleopatra's forces and won the Roman civil war following Julius Caesar's death in 31BC. Augustus ordered a census to be taken of his empire in order to not only know how many people he had in the empire but also how much tax revenue he could expect as well. Luke adds the historical detail that this was the first census while Quirinius was governor of Syria. The implication was there were other censuses while Quirinius was governor or proconsul of Syria but this was the first one. Syria was one of the greater Roman provinces and Judea as a lesser province would have been accountable to whoever ruled over Syria. The greater provinces had regular legions to keep order. The lesser provinces had auxiliary legions. The greater provinces were ruled by men of the senatorial class, many of whom had been consuls. They were called proconsuls. The lesser provinces were ruled by men of the equestrian order and were called governors or procurators. This was the title and rank of Pontius Pilate and all the governors of Judea mentioned in the New Testament like Festus and Felix. We know that Herod the Great is still a Roman client king over Judea at the time of Jesus' birth so the census took place sometime late in Herod's reign. He died in 4BC, so perhaps it was ordered in 5 or 6 BC. Everyone was required to return to their family home to register and be counted. Whether that was consistent throughout the empire or only in certain provinces I do not know. It seems likely that this was the policy throughout the empire. It also is likely that slaves were exempted from this practice since they could not freely return to their ancestral homes and often were slaves far away from their homes. It speaks to a time when people did not live far from where they were born even despite Roman roads and trade.

The whole point of the census for Augustus was to exert political and economic control over his empire. He would show the Mediterranean world that Caesar was in charge. He did not know that his plan set in motion the fulfillment of the prophecy of Micah 5, 700 years before Augustus. The truth is God was in control and even the mighty Caesar was only doing his bidding in order to fulfill his plan to save the world.

**2:4-7** - Did Mary and Joseph wonder how the child was to be born in Bethlehem as Micah had prophesied? Had Joseph pondered how to take Mary there and what reason he could give their families in order for the prophecy to be fulfilled? If he had God worked out the details for him.

The reality was however that the journey was not a pleasant one. Mary was almost nine months pregnant when they set out from Bethlehem to Nazareth on foot. The journey was about 70 miles in a straight line, but would have been longer via the roads of the time. Plus no matter what route they took it would have been up and down hills. Christmas cards always show Mary

riding on a donkey. The facts are Joseph was a poor carpenter and could not afford a donkey. It is possible he borrowed one but unlikely. The most likely scenario is that Mary and Joseph walked the entire way. That is what poor people were forced to do. They walked. She is nine months pregnant with her first child due at any day and she must take a 70 mile journey by foot over the hills and valleys of Judea. This was a very difficult time for Mary. Joseph must have been very concerned for her. But he must go to Bethlehem because he is of the house and family of David and that was where he must by Roman law register. Mary is betrothed to him and pregnant. Tongues would have been wagging in Nazareth over her pregnancy but Joseph has cared for her and not divorced her according to God's instructions we read about in Matthew's account. Legally Jesus is Joseph's son and according to the census he is too, but in reality Jesus is born out of wedlock!

Mary and Joseph reach Bethlehem and there is no place for them to stay. No inn has any room. Joseph was of the house of David but he had no family in the area who knew them and could take them in because they end up staying in a stable, probably one of the many caves in the limestone of the area where shepherds kept their sheep or farmers their animals. It is possible it was the innkeeper's stable and he took pity on them but that is only conjecture. The point is the trip had taken its toll on Mary, there is no place to stay and she is going to have to deliver her baby in a barn! Suffering comes at the beginning of Jesus' life just as it does at the end.

Undoubtedly the rough journey hastens Mary's labor and she goes into labor without anyone to help except Joseph and it is almost certain that Joseph had little or no knowledge of delivering a baby. As Mary had carried Jesus throughout her pregnancy she and her mother must have laid plans for what they would do when Mary's labor came. Nazareth or a village nearby probably had a midwife or some woman who was experienced at helping women deliver babies. She would have been expected to help along with others of Mary's close friends and family. She would have had a support network of many women she knew to help her deliver her firstborn. Also remember she is probably no more than 15 or 16 years old at this time. But now in the stable-cave in Bethlehem none of that can happen. Joseph is there with her as she is wracked with pain lying in the straw. If there are complications in Mary's delivery and Jesus' birth they both may die. Death in childbirth was common in those days. The simple fact is the salvation of the world hung by a thread depending on an inexperienced carpenter who knew how to make tables and doorframes but nothing about delivering babies and a first-time teenage mother. That Jesus came into the world at all is a miracle!

He did come into the world and he and Mary both survived the ordeal because God was with them. His only Son had become the most helpless thing in the world, a human baby. The Messiah was born; he was born to poor parents; he was born not in a palace but a stable. His mother was alone except for her husband to be who probably felt as helpless as he had ever felt in his life throughout the whole ordeal. Perhaps someone from the inn brought some water and clean swaddling cloths for the baby, Luke does not tell us. Somewhere Mary and Joseph had managed to procure some to wrap their newborn son. It is interesting to note that the Jews wrapped their babies in swaddling cloths to keep them secure and diapered. They wrapped their dead in something similar and so quite by accident Jesus, at the beginning and at the ending of his life is wrapped in swaddling cloths. Mary places him in a manger, a cattle's feeding trough stuffed with straw or hay because there is no other place to put him. So the Messiah, the Word made flesh, the only Begotten Son of God comes into the world and is placed in a feeding trough for farm animals. The first smells he smells as a human being are barn smells including manure.

Hardly what one would expect. It is just as Isaiah had prophesied in Isaiah 52-53. Who would have believed what happened?

Once the ordeal of labor is over one wonders whether Joseph was pondering what he should do next. My guess is Mary is focused on caring for her baby, getting him to nurse and keeping him dry. Her motherly instincts probably took over. Joseph's fatherly instincts probably did to, planning for what to do next, finding better lodging, which he eventually did because Matthew reports that they were in a house in Bethlehem when the Magi came some time later. Perhaps he found local work in order to provide for his new family. Mary was caring for her infant son but was most likely exhausted from her labor. Joseph probably could not have moved her and the child for some days after the birth.

One other thing to note: Luke's account is very understated here just like it is at Jesus' crucifixion. People knew the circumstances of birth in the ancient world and all the risks and pain involved. There are no anesthetics and sterile delivery rooms. Any woman reading the account could have put herself in Mary's place and any man in Joseph's. Luke did not need to give all the gory details. People, including Theophilus could fill in the details for themselves. It is part of the genius of his story telling that he does not give us more details than necessary. His narrative is simple and understated and brilliant!

**2:8-12** - Luke now shifts the scene to outside Bethlehem to the fields and hills around the town. He focuses on some shepherds tending their flocks in the night. Shepherds in Jesus' day were despised and had a low reputation. They were thought to be thieves and were included on the Pharisees' list of despised trades; people whom they had concluded could not enter the Kingdom of God because they could not repent in the Pharisees' required manner. They were outcasts. Most of the time they were hired laborers whom wealthy landowners would hire out to tend the sheep. The shepherds outside Bethlehem were probably of this class. Some have suggested that they were tending the huge temple herds for the daily sacrifices in the temple. That is possible though Luke gives us no clues as to whether this is true or not.

The remarkable irony is that shepherds are despised yet the Scriptures refer to the Lord as Israel's shepherd. The prophets call the Messiah the shepherd of his people. Shepherd images are found throughout the Old Testament and they are almost always positive. The prominent negative image is found in Ezekiel 34 where Ezekiel complains against Israel's shepherds, the leaders, priests and kings who have not cared for God's people. Then he says that God will shepherd them and save them. There is this contrasting image of shepherds by Jesus' birth that is both positive and negative. At any rate the shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem the night of Jesus' birth did not have a good reputation and many would have believed that they would have been the last people God would want to communicate with about his Son being born.

The reality is they are the first to hear that the Messiah is born. They are tending their flocks in the hills around Bethlehem when an angel of the Lord appears to them. The glory of God shines around them, that is, the light of his presence and holiness. When this happens they are filled with fear and are terrified. Think of it from their perspective. The angel appears suddenly with a great light around him and them and the overwhelming sense of God's presence and holiness. If the religious leaders of your day and the local rabbis had told you all your life that you could not enter the Kingdom of God because God despised shepherds what would you be thinking at the moment the angel appears? I am convinced they thought God was going to judge them and everything the Pharisees' said was true. God despised them. How could they

have thought anything else? They were shepherds! Like so many others to whom angels appear in the Bible their first response is fear and panic!

But the angel has a different message. He tells them not to be afraid. He tells them he has a message of good news to them and to all the people. This message is one of great joy because today in Bethlehem, David's town, the Messiah, the Savior is born! He is God himself come among you which was the meaning of Christ the Lord. The angel tells the shepherds before anyone else knows that Messiah is born. God comes to the outcasts before he comes to the priests or the nobility or the rich or the rabbis or the Pharisees or Sadducees or anyone else. He gives the first birth announcement to his people to humble outcast shepherds! As if to answer their questions of how can we know this to be true, he gives them a sign to check out. The sign the angel gives the shepherds is a strange one that can't be missed. A baby wrapped in cloths was normal and would have described almost every baby in Bethlehem. A baby wrapped in cloths lying in a manger was unique. No one would put a baby in a feeding trough. It couldn't be missed! They would know they had found the newborn Messiah when they found the baby wrapped in cloths lying in a manger. If God had come to the shepherds first with the good news of his Son's birth the shepherds must have wondered about the sign concerning the child. Messiah born in a stable, lying in a manger? God sure is strange! Is this how the king of Israel, David's Son and God's Son, the Savior of the world is to be born? Yes it is! God humbled himself and took on the form of a servant; he stooped down underneath the whole human race in order to raise us up with him and bring us back to God!

**2:13-14** - As if the rest of heaven cannot contain its enthusiasm any longer the angel is joined by his colleagues, a whole host of them singing God's praises. The heavenly host is a military term in the Old Testament. One of God's names, especially in Isaiah is the Lord of Hosts. The NLT translates that the Lord of Heaven's Armies. Christmas cards paint this like some massive angelic choir in robes singing of the Messiah's birth. Luke's language suggests these angels are heaven's army that will accompany God's Son and Messiah at his coming. They are arrayed for battle in the heavenly places but instead of attacking they sing! Their song is one of praise and one of comfort and blessing to people. Peace they sing to shepherds who probably did not think they would ever be at peace with God. The angels sing God's favor rests on them and on all those whom God will call. Grace and peace is a favorite greeting throughout the New Testament used frequently by the apostles. Here the angels give grace and peace to the shepherds.

What must that music have sounded like? It must have been eerie, beautiful and most of all unforgettable.

**2:15-20** - Once the angels' singing stopped and the angels return to heaven the shepherds waste no time. It must have seemed starkly quiet and dark once the angelic concert had stopped. They determine they are going to search for the child and find him because they understand the Lord has communicated to them about the birth of the Messiah.

They leave the sheep and head off to Bethlehem. How long they searched Luke does not tell us but it must have taken them some time. There are many caves around the hills of Bethlehem where animals could be kept. Plus, they are still shepherds, it is night and they have a dubious reputation among the townspeople. They probably had to be careful how they searched.

At some point they find the right cave, perhaps the innkeeper's stable-cave, and they go in. There they find the newborn baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. What did Joseph and Mary think when the shepherds walked into the stable? Did they think the shepherds were

going to rob them? Somehow the shepherds are able to communicate what the angels told them concerning Jesus. Luke says Mary treasured these things in her heart. She stored them up to think upon as she pondered her son and what God had done. It was confirmation that what Gabriel had told her had been the truth; Jesus was the Messiah!

The shepherds leave the stable and go tell anyone who will listen the news about Messiah being born and how the angels came to them in the fields. Did a steady stream of visitors result from their testimony, people coming to see the child? It is possible. What must Joseph and Mary have thought? Jesus being a newborn wasn't thinking at all. He was sleeping, nursing, crying and cooing; doing what newborn babies do. He was the Messiah, yet who would have believed it? Yet the shepherds' story was there for those who would believe, just as the women's story was there on Easter for those who had the faith to understand the truth. Messiah was born. The savior of the world had come. No wonder the shepherds left praising God. God has sought them out with the good news of greatest joy. A savior had been born to them, to the poor, the outcasts, the shepherds! Glory to God in the highest!

God's plan had been set in motion. Now it would play out over the next thirty or so years as Jesus the baby grew up and became Jesus the man.

**2:21** - Jesus is circumcised on the eighth day as the Law stipulated and was given the name Jesus which Gabriel had told Mary to name him and the angel had told Joseph to name him in Matthew. Luke implies that the circumcision happened in Bethlehem and not Jerusalem because Joseph and Mary take Jesus to Jerusalem for the first born sacrifice but that is later than his circumcision and naming.

**2:21-24** - The Law in Leviticus 12 and Exodus 13 stipulated a lamb for the sacrifice of presentation for a firstborn son and purification for Mary's bleeding after birth. If one was too poor to afford a lamb then a pair of doves was acceptable. This is a key piece of evidence to help us know that Mary and Joseph were poor. He was not a middle class tradesman. Joseph was a poor carpenter-laborer because he and Mary offered the two turtle doves for the sacrifice. If they had the means they would have sacrificed a lamb. Jesus therefore grew up in a loving but poor family.

**2:25-32** - Simeon is the first of two people who give prophecies about Jesus when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple for the dedication sacrifice. Luke says Simeon was waiting for the Messiah and the Holy Spirit was with him or upon him. God had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. The Spirit prompts him to go to the temple courts that day and he sees Mary and Joseph with the baby. He takes the child in his arms, blesses him and prophesies about him. He declares that God has fulfilled his promise to him and he is now free to die in peace because he has seen God's Messiah, the one who brings salvation to Israel and a light of revelation for the Gentiles. Luke reinforces the idea that Jesus will bring the Gentiles to God. Matthew gives the same message but tells the story of the Magi to communicate it. Both gospel writers include this theme in their birth narratives showing that Jesus is not only the savior of Israel but of the whole world.

Luke is telling us that at the time of Jesus' birth godly Jews were looking for the Messiah and the Holy Spirit was working in them prompting them to be looking. There were some who knew the true identity of the poor child even if the rich and powerful did not. God was telling his faithful remnant and the poor that good news was coming! Messiah was born!

**2:33-35** - Mary and Joseph marvel at Simeon's blessing. He is telling them the truth and yet Jesus' parents marvel. Perhaps they still are having trouble believing everything the Lord keeps confirming about Jesus.

Simeon blesses them and tells Mary that Jesus will be controversial and will bring people to God but also divide the people. In other words some will reject him and some will accept him. That will be the nature of his mission and his Messiahship. Then he adds a sword will pierce your own soul too. That can be taken two ways. One, Mary will suffer when Jesus suffers because she is his mother and it will break her heart to see the suffering that he must go through for the salvation of the world. Two, Mary must make a decision about Jesus as well. The figure of the sword Jesus uses later in Matthew 10, that he came not to bring peace but a sword. The word he uses in Luke is division. It is also the case that Mary and Jesus' brothers think he is insane at one point and come to take him away. It is possible that during his ministry Mary was uncertain about Jesus but by the time of his crucifixion and resurrection she trusts her son. Both meanings are possible.

**2:36-38** - Luke then tells us about Anna and her prophecy, although he does not give us any of the details of what she said only that she praised God for the child and told everyone that the Messiah had been born.

Anna was an elderly widow who lived at the temple and worshipped there every day. Luke says she was from Asher. Her tribe had been carried off to exile and destroyed by Tiglath-Pileser III around 745BC. Her ancestors must have fled south to Judah and preserved their tribal identity. Otherwise it would have been lost. Why does Luke include her here? She is a woman and the Holy Spirit is working in her as well as men like Simeon. She is from Asher, one of the so-called lost tribes of Israel and God has sent Jesus to save Israel, all his ancient people, not just Judah. Finally, Anna, like the shepherds shares about the child with everyone she meets. Luke shows us that telling others about Jesus is the proper response when you know who he is!

**2:39-40** - Joseph and Mary finish meeting the Law's requirements with the sacrifices so they leave Jerusalem and return to Galilee, to Nazareth. Luke does not include the visit of the Magi nor the flight to Egypt. Presumably these incidents happen before they return to Nazareth and Luke chooses to leave them out because they do not fit into his plan and story for his gospel.

Luke gives us a simple summary of the early years of Jesus in his parent's home in Nazareth. He grew in wisdom and the grace of God was upon him. That's all we need to know. The apocryphal gospels try and tell us what Jesus did growing up and all of those accounts are legendary. God was with Jesus and he did not sin, yet he was not anointed with the Spirit for his ministry and mission. It was not yet time.

**2:41-52** - Luke is the only gospel writer that gives us any detail of Jesus as a child. Here he shares a story from Jesus' bar-mitzpah year at the temple in Jerusalem. Mary or one of Jesus' brothers or sisters is almost certainly the source.

His parents go up to Jerusalem for Passover and Jesus goes with them. Whether their other children went Luke does not say. Jesus is the oldest and firstborn and this is a watershed year in his life because he is twelve, his bar-mitzpah year, when he comes of age in Jewish custom and can worship with the other men in the synagogue and comment on the Scriptures. All the people from Nazareth who were going to the feast would have traveled together both for safety and because of the feast. It was a time of celebration and communal joy.

The Passover celebration is finished and everyone is heading home. Mary and Joseph assume that Jesus is with some of his friends with others from the village. That was not out of the ordinary; people took care of one another and looked out for the children together. When the day ends and it is time to stop for the night they search for Jesus but can't find him. Now they are alarmed! They return to Jerusalem and after a three day search finally find him in the temple, talking with the priests and teachers of the Law! The teachers are amazed at his understanding and insight and his shrewd questions. Mary and Joseph find him and are amazed as well. Mary addresses him and asks why he has treated his mother and father this way? We've been searching for you and anxious for you! Can't you imagine what is going through their minds? Jesus is the Messiah; we're responsible for him and we've lost him! What if he's been kidnapped or sold into slavery or worse injured or killed? What are we going to do? All of those kinds of questions are running through Mary and Joseph's mind. You can hear Mary's anger with Jesus which is probably born out of her fear.

Jesus gives them an honest yet cryptic answer. Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I would be in my Father's house? They didn't understand what he was saying. Luke plays out the question of who is Jesus' real father: Joseph or God? This shows that even at the age of twelve Jesus has a growing realization that he has a unique relationship with God.

They return with Jesus to Nazareth and Luke says Jesus was obedient to his parents. God takes that command most seriously in the Law of Moses. Jesus did not break it! The implication is also he did not break the command to be obedient to his parents when he stayed in the temple either. Jesus grows in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and people. Luke says Mary treasured all these things in her heart. This is the second time Luke uses that phrase, the other is after the birth and the report of the shepherds. Who else but Mary would have known these things? This is evidence to me that Mary is the primary source for Luke concerning the early years of Jesus.

We know nothing else of Jesus' growing up years. Luke did not consider any other details as relevant to Theophilus and his readers to understand the significance of Jesus and his ministry. He grew up and became a man. Sometime later yet still before he begins his ministry Joseph must have died and Jesus would have taken over the carpenter's shop and provided for his mother and brother and sisters as the first born and oldest was supposed to do. That was probably one reason he waited until he was around thirty to begin his ministry. The other and more important reason Luke will deal with next, the ministry of John the Baptist.

### **Chapter 3:**

**3:1-3** - The fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar would have been 29AD. That is when John begins his ministry. Luke is more Greek than the other gospel writers in that he gives more historical detail about when things took place. At the same time he preserves carefully details of Jewish culture unlike the other gospels.

Luke places John's ministry at a particular point in history. He does the same with Jesus. The point being they lived. They were real people who had a specific place and time in history when they fulfilled their ministry calling from God, John as the Elijah prophet and Jesus as the Messiah. Their impact in history is based on what they said and did during that particular time. If the gospels could be proven to be made up stories then Christianity would collapse. But they are not made up. John and Jesus really lived. The gospel is grounded in history unlike any other religious message. Luke is helping Theophilus understand that.

**3:4-6** - Luke quotes from Isaiah to help his readers understand who John is. He came out of the desert preaching and offering a baptism of repentance to prepare for Messiah's coming. His baptism is related to forgiveness just as Jesus' baptism, but it is looking forward to what will be done, whereas Jesus' baptism looks back at the cross and resurrection, what has been accomplished for us.

The Isaiah passage does not refer to the Elijah prophet, the forerunner of the Messiah, but both John and Jesus refer to this passage when trying to explain who John is and what his mission was. The image of the prophet is of the land being prepared for the coming of the king, the roads being fixed and straightened. Luke quotes the passage as pointing to people's lives being prepared for the coming of the Messiah. We need to straighten out what is crooked and smooth the rough places in our lives. All people will see God's salvation, not just the Jews when God comes, when Messiah comes. Luke often highlights the universal appeal of the gospel since he is writing to a Gentile audience.

**3:7-9** - John preaches repentance and a change of heart and life. He sees the Messiah as bringing judgment and fire. The cold legalistic religion of the Pharisees he rejects. He desires hearts that are on fire for God and waiting for him. True faith and deeds are what count for John not Jewish heritage.

**3:10-14** - People came to him and asked what they should do. John's counsel is remarkably simple. Nowhere does he say leave everything and follow him. He calls people to repent, love others, don't cheat, share what they have with those in need. John does not reject anyone who genuinely wants to repent and be baptized, even tax collectors, which the Pharisees said could not repent. John defines repentance quite differently than the Pharisees. In many ways John's teaching is remarkably similar to Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount or Sermon on the Plain.

**3:15-18** - People kept questioning John as to whether he was the Messiah. Consistently he denied it saying there was another who was coming greater than he was. He would baptize with the Holy Spirit which was one of the great prophecies of the Messiah, that the time of the Messiah would be the time of the Holy Spirit on all God's people. John also adds fire to his picture of the Messiah and sees him as bringing his judgment on a sinful people. God is going to gather his remnant and judge the rest so repent so you are not judged.

Clearly his message caused a great stir among the people. Paul in Acts 19 in Ephesus even finds some disciples of John, so his message had spread all the way to Asia among the Jews. He captured people's imaginations and their longings for the Messiah's coming. He framed Jesus' coming as one of judgment and salvation. He emphasized the coming of the Holy Spirit which meant the age to come; the age of the Messiah was coming soon. The implication of his preaching is that the Messiah is almost here. The time of waiting is over. The kingdom of God is at hand!

**3:19-20** - John, like the Old Testament prophets was not a respecter of persons. He rebuked tax collectors, Pharisees and even Herod Antipas for taking his brother's wife as his own. Herod could not allow the insult to go unpunished so he threw John into prison. It was that incident that signaled Jesus to begin his ministry.

**3:21-22** - When John is baptizing people in the Jordan Jesus comes to be baptized too. This was before he was arrested by Herod. His arrest is like a handoff in football or a pass in basketball. The focus shifts from John to Jesus once Herod puts John in prison.

Jesus is baptized not because he needs to repent but because he wants to identify with people who are repenting and getting ready for the Messiah, who are looking for the Kingdom of God. Jesus in Matthew adds he is baptized to fulfill all righteousness.

As Jesus is praying, presumably while in the water or coming up out of the water based on the other gospel accounts, the heavens are opened. Isaiah had hoped God would rend the heavens and come down in Isaiah 64, now he does come down but not in judgment and wrath, but gently with his Spirit like a dove. The Holy Spirit comes down upon Jesus in bodily form Luke says. Was there an actual dove that comes? Or is this just a metaphor? The other gospels also mention the figure of the dove. In Genesis it is the dove that comes back with the olive branch in its mouth to signify that there is dry land after the flood. In Leviticus a dove is allowed as a sacrifice for those too poor to purchase or offer a lamb. The shepherd describes his bride as a dove in Song of Solomon. It is a figure of gentleness and beauty in the Old Testament. Here at Jesus' baptism it is a sign of love, gentleness and grace coming upon the Son. John said Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire a figure of judgment. The Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus but with peace, gentleness and love. The fire is for another time. In that sense John did not fully understand God's already-not yet plan for his Messiah. The fire of judgment would be cast upon his Son rather than outward to the nations and to the wicked.

When the Spirit comes so does a voice from heaven, the Father's voice. It affirms Jesus as who he is, the Son of God, the beloved, in whom he is well pleased. The Trinity is present at Jesus' baptism. The Son comes up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus from heaven like a dove and the voice of God the Father comes from heaven speaking words of approval and love. Jesus' baptism represents the beginning of his ministry, the confirmation of his identity as God's Son and Messiah, and his endowing with the Holy Spirit to carry out his mission. He was still without sin all this time but now he takes up his ministry and mission on a much greater plane. Luke will emphasize Jesus' relationship with the Holy Spirit to a much greater extent than the other gospels. Part of that is a matter of continuity with Acts and to show Theophilus that the same Spirit that filled Jesus is the same Spirit that filled the apostles and fills us.

**3:23-37** - Luke gives his genealogy of Jesus after his baptism, which goes all the way to the end of chapter 3. He begins by saying Jesus is about thirty years old when he began his ministry. Traditionally scholars have said Jesus was 30 and died at 33. If however, John began his ministry in 29AD, and Jesus was born sometime before 4BC when Herod died then Jesus was in his early thirties but 30 is only an approximation and not an absolute age. This is one of those places where Luke shows an ambiguous attitude about the historical details of Jesus' life. On the one hand he is very careful with much of his narrative, including very precise details of Jewish cultural life and how Jesus interacted with people. On the other hand he can be loose with details that modern people would have though very important, like the precise age of Jesus when he began his ministry. This ambiguity shows us that Luke is not writing a simple history like we would write or even other Greek historians of his day would write. He is writing a gospel to help Theophilus and his readers understand the truth of what they have believed. Luke focuses on the details of Jesus' story that help him meet that goal, and not on all the historical details upon which we would focus. The gospels are written to lead to faith and encourage faith not as

journalistic reporting or what we would call scientific history. That does not mean Luke is not historical, on the contrary he is a very careful historian. It simply means we need to come to his gospel on his terms and not ours and not judge his writing by our standards or expectations but instead let Jesus speak as himself from the pages of Luke's gospel.

He begins his genealogy with the cryptic phrase; he was the son, so it was thought of Joseph. Matthew gives us Joseph's genealogy and shows how Joseph is the direct ancestor in an unbroken line, from father to son of the ancient kings of Judah all the way back to Solomon and David. Luke's genealogy is different and contains no king of Judah or Israel until he gets to David. He traces Jesus' line through Nathan, another son of David by one of David's other wives or concubines. After David Luke's and Matthew's genealogies converge. They both cannot be literally true genealogies of Joseph, Jesus' earthly father. The solution of many scholars which I accept is that Luke gives us Mary's genealogy and that Mary was also descended from David through Nathan, another son of David. Jesus' human genes therefore are from David as were Joseph's, his earthly father. Perhaps historical or cultural difficulties prevented Luke from saying this is Mary's genealogy and Jesus' human descent through his mother. It is impossible to know. One must deal with the differences in the two gospel genealogies. Since Luke focuses much of his early narrative on Mary it makes sense to see his genealogy as Mary's. The phrase so it was thought is a clue that what follows is not really about Joseph but about Jesus' mother. That is my best guess. If that is true then the only reasonable source for Jesus' genealogy is Mary or one of Jesus' brothers or sisters who preserved their mother's bloodline.

**3:38** - Matthew takes Jesus' genealogy back to Abraham to show that Jesus is a true Jew and son of Abraham. Luke takes his genealogy all the way back through Seth to Adam to show that he is both truly human and is the second Adam, the true human who will bring us back to God. The second Adam is a Pauline insight into Jesus and Luke probably learned the concept from Paul his friend and missionary companion.

Luke traces Jesus' genealogy from Adam back through Seth and not Cain. Cain represents sinful humanity who rebel and reject God and who was cursed with a mark because of the murder of his brother. Seth represents those who follow in the footsteps of Able and who seek God and want to follow him.

## **Chapter 4:**

**4:1-2** - Luke gives his version of Jesus' temptation. The order is slightly different in Matthew's version but all other details are essentially the same. This points up how the oral tradition in the Jewish Christian synagogues worked. The essential details and narrative of the story are preserved intact but certain details or order of the story are open to change depending on the story teller or the writer. Which version is true? Both are. Which is more accurate? It is impossible to tell. The tradition allowed the authors of the gospels to shape their material for their own purposes within limits. If the essential details of the story are preserved they had some leeway in how they presented it. This is Bailey's informal control theory of transmission of Jesus' life and teaching.

Jesus is now full of the Holy Spirit, meaning he is submitted to him and is in step with him, just as we can be filled. He is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. The wilderness is the territory to the west of Jericho and the Jordan Valley, the mountains that rise up from the Rift Valley of the Jordan to the Mount of Olives. It is some of the driest, most desolate country in Israel. Luke says Jesus was there 40 days, a symbolic number that ties him to Noah,

Moses and Elijah in the Old Testament. Luke says that Jesus was tempted throughout those forty days, Matthew says it was at the end of the forty days Jesus was tempted. Regardless, Jesus fasts the entire time. Physically he is weak, but spiritually he is strong and ready for Satan's assault. He is also hungry after all that time. One of two things is happening with the forty days, either Jesus is at the very limit of the human body in terms of eating or he is being supernaturally helped as God did with Moses and Elijah and their times on the mountain and in the wilderness. Luke does not tell us clearly which is true. Perhaps both are.

**4:3-4** - Satan comes to Jesus after his forty day fast when he is physically weakest and tempts him through his hunger. Satan seizes on a human felt need to try and get Jesus to meet that need with his own power as Son of God separate from the Holy Spirit leading and empowering him. In other words if the mission of the Messiah was to be endowed with, led by and anointed by the Spirit, Satan says bypass all of that. Take care of your needs yourself. You're hungry and you have power, use it. Focus on yourself! He tempts Jesus to do a simple thing, change the stones into bread. Feed himself. This is no miracle of the feeding of a multitude. This is a selfish miracle. Who will know? You're hungry, meet your needs, you have a right!

Jesus replies with Scripture, which he does in each temptation. This quote is from Deuteronomy 8:3, "man does not live by bread alone." The rest of the verse says but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of the Lord, in other words God's Word. Here Jesus' reply focuses on our needs. Physical hunger, physical needs, while important, are not the center of our lives. Did Jesus need to eat? Of course, and if he did not soon he was going to starve to death. But his immediate physical need was not more important than God's purposes for him. Plus, selfishly using his own power as Son of God to meet that immediate physical need would have been disobedient to the Spirit who had led him into the wilderness in the first place. He would have seized his own power separate from the Spirit's power which was his mission and to which he had submitted himself. Doing that he would have selfishly elevated his own agenda and needs above God's. That is sin. Instead, Jesus once again submits himself to God's will and trusts his Father and the Spirit to meet his needs when it is time.

Though the temptation to Jesus is to do something that only he could have done, yet the core of the temptation is precisely one that we face constantly. Meet our own needs when we want to. Don't trust God to meet them. Don't submit to God. We have rights! It is selfish. Jesus' answer points to our answer as well. Our physical needs or any of our needs are not more important than God's plan for us and trusting God to care for us!

**4:5-8** - In the second temptation Satan leads Jesus to a high mountain and shows him in some supernatural way all the kingdoms of the world. He claims they are his as they have been given to him and he can give them to whomever he wills. Is this a lie or is Satan actually telling the truth here, twisting it in order to tempt Jesus? He is called the prince of this world by Jesus in John 12. Paul says in Ephesians that he is the prince of the air, the leader of the demonic powers of the world. I think in some ways he is telling the truth. Were the kingdoms of the world given to him? Perhaps; they may have been given over to Satan at the fall when Adam surrendered his authority to the devil. The point is Jesus had come to make the kingdoms of this world the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. That was his mission as Messiah; rescue the human race from the rule of Satan, sin and death.

Satan actually offers Jesus the prize he is after. There is a catch. Worship Satan. Bow down to him and serve him and he will not have to go to the cross. There won't have to be any

death and sacrifice. The kingdoms will be his. Why go God's way when you can get what you want without having to suffer?

Jesus' answer goes to the core of the issue. He quotes once again from Deuteronomy, here from 6:13. Worship the Lord and serve him alone. In some ways the core of this temptation is the same as the first. Be selfish. Don't go God's way go your own way. Isn't the goal more important than the way to get there? What does that matter? The ends can justify the means. In some respects this is similar to Satan's temptation to Adam and Eve in the Garden. The goal is to be like God, who cares how you get there. God's ways can't be trusted. There's an easier, better way to get where you want to go. Don't go God's way it's not necessary and it's too hard! Trust to your own judgment and not God's! He doesn't have your best interest at heart anyway. Jesus says no. I trust in the Lord and I serve him alone. Serving Satan and bowing down to him in order to achieve my end, even if it is the end I desire is a disaster. If Jesus had taken this way Satan would have been exalted to God's place and the human race would have been forever enslaved to him.

For us the temptation is to go our own way in order to fulfill God's design for us. Take the easy road. Trust to our own judgment and not God's. We know better, he doesn't. What could it hurt? The stakes are higher with Jesus but the temptation is the same!

**4:9-12** - The devil comes a third time. This is the second temptation in Matthew but Luke puts it third. It is possible that Luke is using a more Hebrew style with the point in the middle here, which is curious since he is a Gentile but Matthew is a Jew. Luke's source however might have been preserved in the Messianic synagogues in which case it would have been in a Hebrew form. Matthew's source may have been his recollection of Jesus' telling the story to the disciples himself. That by the way is the only feasible source for the temptation narratives; Jesus himself.

The devil takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple above the Kidron Valley and tells him to throw himself off if he is the Son of God. The phrase, if you are the Son of God, ties the first and third temptations together. The second temptation, the middle temptation, does not contain that phrase. Here Satan quotes Scripture back at Jesus. He takes a verse out of context and uses it as a pretext for Jesus to once again selfishly force God to do something. Don't wait for the resurrection for God to show you are his Son, do it now! Don't go through three years of ministry doing miracles and being tired and hungry and trying to teach those twelve guys you're going to call who won't get it anyway, do it now! If you force God to save you, and after all that's what he says in his Word isn't it, people will hail you as Messiah now! No cross, no pain, no suffering; do it!

This temptation is like the other two in that it tempts Jesus to selfishly go his own way rather than the way his Father has set before him. Trust in his own judgment in how to best fulfill his mission. Assert his own power and authority and stop playing the servant. Be self-willed and independent from the Father. He's the Son of God, he has rights too! But Jesus' way was to lay down his rights and take the form of a Servant, even to death. From the moment he began his ministry, in fact from the moment he was born; his way was always the Via Dolorosa. That was God's plan. And Jesus during these temptations submits himself to it and locks onto it. The only time he ever questions it is in the Garden but that time ends with not my will but yours be done.

Once again Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy, here from 6:16; don't put the Lord to the test. Don't tempt the Lord. Jesus knows Satan is right, God would have saved him, but it wouldn't have been right and the recognition of him as Messiah would have been all wrong. Jesus had come to fulfill his mission and fulfill the Scriptures. He was the Servant-Messiah, not the

conquering Messiah. For us, the temptation is whether to submit to God's plan for us or our own. Do we push God to prove his love for us or submit to him and discover his love in a much deeper way? Do we believe that God's plan for us is the most fulfilling and will result in the greatest good for us and others or do we assert our own self-will and say we have a better way? Jesus shows us the way of the Servant in his submission to his Father and his plan. We need to do the same.

*Note:* In this temptation Satan uses the Scriptures. He knows them even though they are God's Word and the truth which he hates. He can twist them to his own ends. We need to be on guard for that and recognize one of his methods. False teachers often do this; twist Scripture for their own selfish ends. This is Jesus' and Luke's warning to us to watch out!

Jesus' answer is each temptation is from the Word of God. It is the truth and even though Satan can use the Scriptures and twist them out of context yet the answer is always Scripture because God's Word is truth and it is the power that counteracts Satan's lies. He has no power against it.

Finally, Satan's temptations to Jesus come out of his own character which only understands power and the need for self-will and control. What Satan seemingly cannot comprehend or want to understand is the love of God which will submit to suffer for the other. Jesus submits to the Father because he loves him not because he must. That is why abiding in Jesus and walking in the Spirit, learning to love him more and experiencing his love in a deeper way helps us conquer temptation. Satan will always tempt us to self-will and power he cannot understand love and its sacrifice for others and for God.

**4:13** - Luke adds this line at the end of his temptation narrative. There would be other times of temptation for Jesus. This was just the first and most dramatic.

All Scripture quotes during the temptation are from Deuteronomy. This was also not the one and only time Jesus was tempted. We don't learn what the others were or their nature but certainly the mocking of Jesus at the cross was probably one of them. Come down and we'll believe you are the Messiah. That was essentially the same temptation as Satan's here in the wilderness. Don't go to the cross. Don't suffer. It isn't necessary. But it was. It was the cup the Father had given him to drink and Jesus had taken it on in the Garden the night before. The Son would do his Father's will and sacrifice himself for us. Thank God he said yes to his Father and no to Satan. Lord help me always do the same!

**4:14-15** - Luke says Jesus returned to Galilee from the wilderness of Judah in the power of the Spirit. He was filled with God's Spirit for ministry and he was filled after his victory over Satan in his temptations. He goes to Galilee first which is probably around the vicinity of Capernaum which became his headquarters. He began his ministry of teaching, preaching and healing and good reports began to circulate all over Galilee about him. At this point he is praised by everyone.

Jesus' ministry was similar to John's in that he preached and taught about the Kingdom of God. There is evidence in John 3 that Jesus and his disciples early in his ministry were also baptizing people. However that was not a regular feature of Jesus' ministry in the gospels even though it became a central feature of the apostles' ministry. The great difference between Jesus' ministry and John's was that Jesus not only proclaimed the Kingdom of God was now here; he healed and cast out demons to demonstrate it was true. John pointed ahead to one who was coming and said get ready for the Kingdom. Jesus said it is here and demonstrated it by healing

people. Now wonder crowds flocked to him! What John had said was coming Jesus did. Messianic fervor must have been at a fever pitch in Galilee.

**4:16** - It is in that context that Jesus goes home to Nazareth and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath as usual. How many times had his friends and neighbors seen him do this and listened to him read and preach the Word? But now he had begun his ministry and people were excited. No one from Nazareth was famous! It was just a village. Jesus was one of them. Maybe he would do a miracle for them. There were also some who had heard the reports and were doubtless very skeptical. Was what they were hearing about Joseph's son true? Wasn't this Mary's boy the carpenter?

When Jesus stood to read the Scriptures that day there was great anticipation in the synagogue. He was an honored guest and so naturally the scroll was given to him and therefore he was expected to comment on the Scriptures.

**4:17-20** - The Isaiah scroll is handed to him by the *huperates*, the attendant of the synagogue. That would have been the book for that Sabbath. Jesus finds the place that we know as *Isaiah 61:1-2* and reads it. By Jesus' day this is seen as a Messianic passage but it is also ambiguous. Is this the prophet, the Messiah, the Servant or all three? The passage especially blurs the line between the Messiah and the Servant which I believe Jesus specifically tries to do because he has come to fulfill both roles. He is the Messiah but he is also the Lord's Servant who will suffer and die for the sins of the world. People did not put those two roles together in the same person. As far as we know Jesus was the only Jewish rabbi who did. Here in his home town he begins that task.

The prophecy speaks of the Holy Spirit's anointing the Servant for God's mission. Jesus very clearly sees himself in this way and as Luke says in v.14 he is experiencing the Spirit's presence and power in his life. He has come to preach good news to the poor and set the captives free, to heal the blind and release the oppressed. Jesus has come to declare the Lord's Jubilee over sin. He purposely stops the reading before he gets to the next line in Isaiah which speaks of the vengeance of the Lord over his enemies. Jesus did not come to preach judgment but forgiveness.

Many in the synagogue that Sabbath knew this passage. They had heard it before. They knew the next line. They are probably wondering why Jesus stopped mid-sentence. Luke says Jesus rolls up the scroll, hands it back to the attendant, the *huperates*, and sits down. This is the Jewish way. You stood to read the Scriptures and you sat down to teach. That is why the gospels often have Jesus sitting down when he teaches. When Jesus sits down everyone is looking attentively at him. They are all anticipating what he will say and wondering what he will do. What will the local boy made good say to us his hometown people, his friends and neighbors?

**4:21-22** - Jesus says what I believe no one in the synagogue anticipated he would say. Isaiah 61 is fulfilled in your hearing right now today! Jesus is directly claiming to be the one the prophet spoke about who is filled with the Spirit to carry out God's mission. He is claiming to be the Messiah and the Servant of the Lord!

Luke says they were all amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. I think Jesus spoke a lot more about the passage and all Luke does here is summarize how impressed people were about Jesus' teaching. He does this in other places in the gospel and Acts as well.

All we get are the highlights that make the evening news. Remember he has a specific purpose in mind for Theophilus.

Jesus had spoken before in the synagogue, this wasn't the first time they have heard him. Yet something is now different. I think that is the meaning behind the comment, isn't this Joseph's son. They are impressed and sense something is going on but they can't get over the fact they know Jesus and have a specific set of expectations for him. He's not the Messiah, but he just claimed he was. What's going on here? He's the local boy made famous and we have a claim on him. After all, he's our village's son and the honor and fame people are giving him we have a share in too. He is bringing Nazareth great fame! But isn't this Joseph's boy? Isn't this the man who built my table and fixed my door? How does he come by his gracious words? That is part of what is happening in the village that day. They are also wondering how they can cash in on Jesus' fame and honor and bring blessing on their village as well. There would have been a sense of ownership and expectation of obligation that they felt toward Jesus. You belonged to your village just like you belonged to your family. It was the culture!

**4:23-27** - If I am right then Jesus next words make much more sense. He has to break their expectations of him and their sense that he owes them something because he belongs to them. Jesus owes them nothing. He owes his heavenly Father everything. Were his brothers in attendance that day? Perhaps. How about Mary, was she listening behind the women's screen? We do not know. It is possible she was and some of this story is her recollection or some of Jesus' brothers.

Jesus says physician heal yourself! Luke would have enjoyed this! Do a miracle here like you did at Capernaum. Come on, this is your home town; we deserve a little benefit too! You owe us! Jesus then turns it all around. A prophet is not accepted in his own home town. There is too much familiarity. People can't get past what they have known of Jesus and accept him now for who he is and what God wants to do through him. Then Jesus gives two Scriptural examples of miracles from the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, the two great miracle working prophets of the time of the kings. Both of the miracles he quotes were to benefit Gentiles! It's as if Jesus was saying you want a miracle but I wasn't sent to you. I'm going even to the Gentiles to give them God's grace and favor. I'm going to set them free and proclaim to them the good news. But you I am leaving behind because you cannot accept me for who I am.

**4:28-30** - The people in attendance that day at the synagogue, and it was probably packed, are furious with Jesus. How dare he reject his own home town! They become a mob bent on vengeance. They drive him out of the synagogue up to the top of the hill and cliff overlooking Nazareth. Today there is a large hill with a steep cliff overlooking the main town. They are going to throw Jesus down the cliff and kill him! They think because he had rejected their demands for a miracle and their sense of ownership over him that they have the right to judge him and execute him. They are absolutely furious! What had begun as a much anticipated day, Jesus was back home, had turned into an ugly mob! Kill him! This incident in Nazareth is like Jesus' trial in Jerusalem. It prefigures his crucifixion, only here Jesus somehow escapes from the crowd. Luke implies that it was a supernatural escape. He shouldn't have been able to do what he did.

What did this incident do to Mary and his family? Was this one of those things that pierced Mary's soul with a sword? Jesus did return to Nazareth periodically, but it was never the same. Is this the same time as Mark's incident when he reports Jesus could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief? Or does that come later? I think they are the same and this is the

climax of that time. The bottom line is Jesus has broken ties with his hometown and their sense of ownership and Jesus' obligation to them. He is bonded to no one but his Father!

**4:31-32** - Jesus goes down from Nazareth to Capernaum. Luke is correct; it is down from the hills around Nazareth on the northern edge of the Jezreel Valley to Capernaum on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum is around 700 feet below sea level right at the level of the lake. Jesus would have dropped down to the lake on his way to Capernaum.

Capernaum became his ministry headquarters. It was strategically situated near the border of Galilee ruled by Herod Antipas and Philip's territory to the north and east. If Herod had moved against Jesus as he had against John the Baptist Jesus could have easily escaped his territory and fled north into Philip's jurisdiction. Capernaum was also the home of Peter, Andrew, James and John and perhaps a few of the other disciples. Jesus had friends there who could provide for his needs as he traveled around the towns of Galilee preaching and teaching.

He goes into the synagogue on the Sabbath and taught them just as he had done the same thing in Nazareth, only this time there is no ulterior motive or expectation to try and break. He teaches them and like the people's response at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, Luke says the people are amazed at his authority. All rabbis would quote some other rabbi to give authority to their teaching. One would then stand on the shoulders of other rabbis going back generations and lend credibility to your insight. Jesus simply taught the Scriptures and preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God. He didn't appeal to a higher authority because there was none! *HE* was the authority! This was so different than any other rabbi the people had heard and they were impressed by it.

**4:33-37** - Jesus heals a demonized man. He was there in the synagogue. Did he frequent the synagogue and disrupt the worship and teaching there or had he heard Jesus was there and wanted some sort of confrontation and power encounter? Luke does not tell us. The demonized man shouts out, asking Jesus what he wants with them, probably meaning all demons not just the one or ones residing in the man. The demon wants to know if Jesus wants to destroy them. The word is *apollumi*, which means destroy or put an end to, abolish, destroy utterly. The demon then identifies Jesus as the Holy One of God. The title is not quite Messiah, or Son of God. It could be misconstrued to mean something else. In any case Jesus does not want demonic testimony about him because they will try and confuse people and twist the truth. Although here, it appears the demon is telling the truth. Perhaps they were forced to tell the truth by Jesus presence with them. Maybe because of his authority they had to tell the truth, they were trapped. Jesus tells it to be quiet and then orders the demon out of the man. The command is in the singular so there was only one demon and it was speaking of itself and all its fellows in v.34. Jesus simply orders it to come out. He does not send it to the Pit or tell it never to return or anything else. Presumably in this instance all of those things are understood, or there was no need as Jesus' command applied his protection and freedom to the man so that the demon could not return again. Luke shows Jesus doing what he said he came to do and to fulfill, setting the captives and prisoners free.

The demon throws the man down, one last time giving a demonstration of its power, but then because of Jesus' command it is forced to come out of the man. Jesus is in complete control not the demon. The people are amazed because he commands the demons with authority and power to leave and they do. No Jewish exorcist had such power and authority. My guess is they had elaborate rituals they would use to try and make a demon leave or there simply were no exorcists in Galilee and the local rabbis despite their knowledge of Scripture and tradition were

helpless to do anything for a demonized man. Whichever the case, the news about Jesus spread rapidly throughout the countryside. Jesus' ministry was about to become very public!

**4:38-39** - Jesus goes to Simon's house, presumably Simon Peter's. His mother-in-law is sick with a serious fever. They asked Jesus to help. They, probably means Peter and his wife and children, her family. Jesus goes in, bends over her, rebukes the fever and it leaves her. At once she got up and did what a woman of her age and status would do; she waited on Jesus, and their guests. Why did he bend over her? Perhaps he is getting close to her, or comforting her, speaking to her softly. The word for rebuke can also mean to charge with fault or admonish sharply. It is a curious word because it is the same Greek word Luke uses to describe Jesus commanding the demon to leave the man in the synagogue. Was the fever demonically caused? It does not appear to be so. Perhaps Luke is showing that Jesus has authority not only over demons but over human diseases as well. At any rate he heals Peter's mother-in-law. This means Peter is married and has a family!

**4:40-41** - This has all taken place on a Sabbath day so as soon as the Sabbath is over, after sunset, people flock to Peter's house and bring the sick and the demonized to Jesus hoping he will heal them. Luke says he does. He lays his hands on them and heals them miraculously by the power of the Spirit working through him. Luke says he healed each one. No one is left out that night. He rebukes the demons and commands them to come out of people who were demonized. Luke again uses the word rebuke, the same word he used to describe Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law's fever. They would shout that Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus commands them to be silent because he does not want their testimony. They know he is the Messiah but I think Jesus is concerned that they will twist his mission and confuse the people. So he tells them to be silent. Plus do you really want demons to be the ones who are declaring you as Messiah? Jesus had enough trouble with the religious leaders to not have to deal with that.

Why so many demonized people in Galilee during Jesus' ministry? I think because Satan increased his efforts to confuse, distract or sidetrack Jesus. He had been defeated by Jesus in the wilderness and now he wants to slow him down and keep him from doing what he came to do. Satan has called in reinforcements! It also shows how vulnerable the common people were to demonic attack. Their spiritual condition was not healthy, because they were too easily allowing demons to come into their lives!

**4:42-44** - Jesus basically is healing well into the night. At daybreak he goes out to a solitary place. Mark's account says he went out to pray. Simon and the others go out to look for him. They find him and try and make him stay, probably because there are so many sick and demonized people who have come to be healed. Jesus replies that he must go on to other towns and preach the good news of the Kingdom of God because that is the central mission he has been given. Jesus' priority was preaching the Kingdom and calling people to repent and believe the good news and come follow him. Healing and casting out demons were important to him but they were not central to his ministry. Preaching the Kingdom was the central task he had been given to do. Healing was a sign to validate his preaching that when he said the Kingdom of God was among you his healing ministry showed the people it was true.

The church today needs to learn the same lesson. Healing is important but it is not the central mission of the church, preaching the gospel is the central mission of the church. Jesus, after much prayer early in the morning had clarified his mission. He left many who needed

healing in Capernaum and went on to other towns to preach. Jesus had understood that the enemy of the best is often the good. He could have stayed in Capernaum and healed for almost all of his ministry. He could have set up a healing clinic in Capernaum but then no one would have been taught the Kingdom and his disciples would have been healing assistants not apostles to evangelize the world. It is even possible that Jesus would have been so distracted by the needs of the people that he would have never gone to Jerusalem and his real mission of dying on the cross and rising again would have become sidetracked. That is why he left Capernaum and traveled to other villages and towns in Galilee to preach.

Luke says he preached in the synagogues of Judea. There are textual variants here that suggest scribes trying to correct Luke and substitute Galilee. Luke is not being precise in his geography in this verse. He probably means the land of the Jews rather than the Roman Province of Judea. It is clear from the following chapters that Jesus is still in Galilee and has not headed south as yet.

## **Chapter 5:**

**5:1-3** - Jesus helps himself to Peter's boat and has him put out onto the lake far enough so that the people aren't crowding him too much so he can teach them God's Word. Peter, James and John and their companions have been working all night and are cleaning their nets. Jesus had stayed at Simon's house before because he had healed his mother-in-law. Now however Jesus is teaching while Simon and his partners are working. Simon already has a relationship with Jesus but he is not yet a full disciple. He has not left everything, including his family and followed Jesus. Nor at this point has Jesus called Simon to be his disciple, at least Luke has not shared that. We don't know how long the process of Jesus' calling him went on, whether it was over a period of time or followed one particular incident like the miraculous catch.

**5:4-7** - Jesus finishes teaching and asks Simon to put out into deep water and let down their nets to fish. You can hear Simon's frustration in his answer. He doesn't want to disobey Jesus but he clearly doesn't see the point in putting out onto the lake to fish. They have worked hard all night and caught nothing. They are tired and are washing and mending the nets and then will rest. Simon doesn't want to do this but because Jesus asks him he grudgingly accepts the task. They put out onto the lake, let down the nets and catch a huge shoal of fish, so many the nets are breaking and Peter has to call to his other boats, probably James and John, to come help them. In fact the nets are so full and the fish are so many that both boats are threatening to sink because of the weight of the fish.

My guess is Peter had never caught so many fish at one time in his life. What was the look on Jesus' face sitting in the boat as they worked to haul in the nets? I don't think he was gloating, I think he was smiling with joy because he wanted to bless Simon and his friends. That is his nature. If there was any "I told you so" look it was with compassion and love to the fishermen. Jesus had worked hard all his life in the carpenter's shop or on a jobsite. He knew what it was to work all day and have not much to show for it. He knew what it was like to expend all your energy and still have so much to do. Now he blesses his friends, knowing somehow where the shoal of fish was and that it was ready to be caught if they but trusted him and did as he asked. That is the lesson here. We need to trust Jesus and do as he asks. He understands our needs and our situation. When he asks us to go beyond what we think we can do he knows what's going on. We can trust him. When we do we will receive his blessing and his joy. Following Jesus and doing as he asks us always brings us joy and his blessing. Sometimes

that blessing will not be material nor does it guarantee that we will not have to work hard or face difficulties to experience it but it will always be good! The boats were about to sink. They were tired but the adrenaline was flowing to get this miraculous catch onto shore! The blessing brought work. Who knows, with the money from the catch Peter may have been able to feed and provide for his family for some time, enabling him to go with Jesus. It is possible that the miracle is not just about Simon but about providing for his family too because Jesus knew what he was going to ask him to do. He cares about us!

**5:8-11** - Simon sees everything that has happened and falls at his knees begging Jesus to get away from him because he is a sinful man. Simon understands at that moment that he is sinful and Jesus is holy. This is not the first miracle Simon has seen Jesus perform, but it is probably the first one that directly benefits him.

Simon, James and John, his partners, and all the men on the boats that day, are astonished at the catch. The word Luke uses means dumbfounded, astonished, filled with wonder or stunned immovable by what they had seen. They can't believe it and their wonder is mixed with a healthy fear towards Jesus and what he can do.

Jesus must sense this because he tells them not to be afraid. Then he gives them a new future; from now on you will catch men. If catching men with Jesus is anything like catching fish with Jesus then how can they not succeed? Did Peter think of this at Pentecost when 3000 came to Christ that day and were baptized? Certainly Jesus' words were fulfilled that day. Jesus offers them a new life focused on him, following him and they take him up on his offer. They pull the boats ashore, leave everything and follow Jesus. Presumably when they get the boats onshore they have someone take care of the fish and sell them to provide for their families. We know from the other gospels James and John leave their father and we can assume from Luke that Peter leaves his wife and family to follow Jesus. They would never be men any rabbi would choose to teach or have as disciples. They were simple fishermen. But Jesus chooses them and that is enough. They leave everything and follow.

One other thing to note. This catch took place off the waters of Capernaum. Only a little over a mile west down the lake is Tabgha, where there was another miraculous catch of fish, after the resurrection when Peter went fishing with some of the disciples. That is when Jesus restores Peter after his denial so that he is ready for his role as leader and shepherd of his flock, the church. Peter could not have missed the connection between that first miraculous catch and the last one. No wonder he jumped out of the boat and swam to shore when John told him it was the Lord. At least he went toward Jesus and didn't tell him get away from me!

**5:12-14** - Jesus and his disciples are in one of the towns around Lake Galilee. A leper comes to him, covered in sores. The Greek word can mean various skin diseases besides leprosy but the Law treated them all the same in order to protect the community from further infection.

The leper begs Jesus to heal him, but does not demand it. He says if you are willing. He knows Jesus has the power to heal him. Jesus reaches out his hand touches the man and heals him. Leprosy meant that no one but another leper could touch the sick man. He was unclean. That touch confirms Jesus' compassion and love toward the man and his suffering. His healing was not gradual but immediate. The compassion and power of Jesus worked healing in the man's skin and body immediately.

Jesus then tells him to go show himself to the priests and offer the proper sacrifices written in the Law of Moses. That means he would have had to travel from Galilee to Jerusalem to the temple in order to fulfill his command. He does this because only the priests could give

him a clean bill of health and completely restore him to his family and give him back his life. Jesus is not trying to be difficult or put barriers in his way in order to have his life restored. Leprosy carried huge stigmas in that culture and Jesus wants to heal all his life not just his physical life. He wants to restore his relationships and his emotional health as well. Can you imagine the leper's journey to Jerusalem and his telling the priests what happened when Jesus healed him? The word would spread to Judea about what Jesus was doing in Galilee!

**5:15-16** - Luke notes Jesus' pattern: intense times with people healing, preaching and teaching, then he would withdraw to lonely places to pray in order to re-charge. Was Jesus an introvert by personality needing alone time to gather energy from his Father for ministry and life? Or was he balanced, taking energy from the crowds as well? It is probably both because even an extrovert needs to re-charge and Jesus would expend tremendous amounts of energy as he taught and healed the people. The crowds pressing around him begging him to heal them would have drained anyone. Intense ministry is exhausting! Jesus shows us the way to re-charge our emotional, physical and spiritual batteries. Spend time away from the crowds and alone with God.

**5:17** - This is the first time Luke mentions the Pharisees. They had come from all over Galilee and even some had journeyed from Judea and Jerusalem. They had probably heard stories of Jesus' healing and miracles and of his teaching and had come to check him out. If they had come from Jerusalem there might have been envoys from Gamaliel or another of the leading Pharisee rabbis, perhaps even some who were from the Sanhedrin. Luke is telling us that the religious authorities now were noticing Jesus and wanted to find out what was going on.

Then he says the power of God was with Jesus to heal that day. The Pharisees were there to check him out but God was there to show his Kingdom! The power of the Lord was with him to heal. Does that mean there were other times when that was not true? I don't think so. I think this is Luke's way of saying that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit who brought him the power to heal and declare God's Kingdom and forgiveness which is exactly what happened.

**5:18-19** - Some men come with a friend who is paralyzed on a mat. They try and get him into the house to lay him before Jesus so he can heal him but cannot. So they go up onto the roof and begin to take the tiles off the roof and lower him down in front of Jesus, who is teaching the whole time. Mark's gospel hints this incident took place at Peter's house in Capernaum. That is entirely possible.

You can picture the scene. Jesus is teaching about the Kingdom of God, the important Pharisees are seated around him hanging on his every word and judging his every word to see if there is anything they disagree with so they can take a report back to Jerusalem about this new teacher in Galilee. As Jesus is talking the friends begin to tear the roof apart and lower their paralyzed friend. Little bits of dirt and roof tile fall around Jesus and maybe even on him or some of the Pharisees. You can almost see the Pharisees questioning why Jesus keeps talking or wondering when he is going to tell these men to stop. He's teaching. They are interrupting him! This is rude and shocking behavior and Jesus is allowing it! No one would get away with such a thing if they had been teaching!

**5:20** - Jesus isn't bothered by the interruption. He is impressed with the faith of the friends and their love for their paralyzed friend. He turns to the sick man and says, "Friend, your sins are

forgiven." I don't think that was what the four friends thought he would say. I think they hoped Jesus would say you are healed or rise and walk. Jesus could be addressing the false notion current in Judaism of the time that if you had some serious disease it was God punishing you or your parents for some sin. He might be correcting that by saying his sins are forgiven. Or, knowing what the Pharisees were thinking he goes directly to the heart of who he is and what his mission is; he is the Servant-Messiah who has come to bring forgiveness to God's people.

**5:21-26** - The Pharisees understand the implications of Jesus' statement. Did the paralytic, or his friends? They immediately think Jesus is blaspheming because only God can forgive sins. The Pharisees question about who does he think he is, is a good one. No one can grant forgiveness except God alone. Jesus' question back to them is also a good one; which is easier forgiveness or healing. Both, only God can do. Jesus is being very clear and the Pharisees know it. He is claiming to be God. Yet the healing did not convince them it hardened them.

This is the first time Jesus uses the title Son of Man for himself in Luke's gospel. This would also confuse the Pharisees because the Son of Man was a Messianic title but also a divine figure in Daniel and the name God used for the prophet Ezekiel, just calling him a man. It is cryptic and Jesus is being very deliberate in his use of the term here. Is he just a man? Is he the heavenly Messiah? Is he God himself? Which is it? Who is he? Jesus' use of the title and his questions to the Pharisees and his actions in healing the man are all designed like a parable to push the Pharisees and the people to a decision about who he is. They are designed to produce faith in him!

Jesus says so you will know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on the earth, something only God could do, he tells the paralytic to get up and walk and he does. He goes home praising God healed and forgiven. The friends on the roof undoubtedly do the same. Everyone else, even the Pharisees, are amazed at what happened and are filled with awe. In one of Luke's great understatement they exclaim, "We have seen remarkable things today!" No kidding!

This is the first confrontation in Luke's gospel Jesus has with the Pharisees and it isn't just the local Pharisees from Galilee, it is with some important Pharisees from Jerusalem. In his first encounter they think he is blaspheming because he is claiming to be God. Jesus reinforces his claim to be God by forgiving the man and healing him. There can be no mistake. The battle lines are drawn. Jesus claims to be God and will keep on claiming to be God. The Pharisees will keep trying to confirm this, probably because they find it so hard to believe and Jesus will keep affirming it, until they either accept or reject him. A few like Joseph and Nicodemus do, the rest plot to crucify him and succeed.

**5:27-32** - Luke follows the forgiving and healing of the paralytic with the call of Matthew or Levi. This too is a story about forgiveness and who can be forgiven. The Pharisees had a very specific program for repentance and forgiveness. One had to confess one's sins, demonstrate your sincerity in repentance and then make restitution for your wrongs. If one of these things could not be done then you could not be forgiven. They had a list of despised trades that did not meet their criteria for repentance and forgiveness. Tax collectors were at the top of their list. What does Jesus do? He sees Levi at his tax booth collecting taxes, getting rich off of others and collaborating with the hated Romans and calls him then and there to follow him as his disciple! It was probably not the first time Levi had heard Jesus or seen him, but whatever the circumstances, Jesus' call to him has its full effect. Levi leaves it all and follows Jesus! The tax

collector is now a disciple! Jesus chooses another man whom the rabbis of his day would never choose! The Kingdom of God is open to those who repent and by faith follow Jesus not those who somehow demonstrate their sincerity to God as if they deserve his forgiveness. Sinners repent and are saved. The righteous think they do not need to repent and so are lost.

Levi, in celebration holds a banquet for his friends and invites Jesus. He wants his friends to meet his new Lord and rabbi. They come, and so does Jesus! He doesn't mind fellowshiping with the other tax collectors and sinners; because these are all people God loves and wants to save. These are the very people Jesus came to die for and to call to repentance and to follow him. The Pharisees complain to the disciples about Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners! These are all people the Pharisees said could not repent because they didn't meet their criteria for repentance. Why is Jesus wasting his time with them? Jesus hears their questions and answers them. He has come to call sinners to repentance not the righteous. In saying this he indicts the Pharisees. Levi and his friends know they are sinners and need forgiveness. They receive Jesus' offer joyfully. The Pharisees think they are righteous and need no repentance. They reject Jesus' offer and are confused by it sitting in judgment over it and over the very people Jesus says he wants to forgive.

Jesus had confronted the Pharisees about who he is when he healed the paralytic. They saw him as claiming he is God and they were right. Now here at Levi's house Jesus attacks their theology of repentance and salvation. He goes right to the heart of their system of keeping the Law in order to be saved. He indicts it and shows it is wanting because they cannot see their own sin!

**5:33** - The Pharisees question Jesus about fasting and praying. They say John's disciples and the Pharisees' disciples often fast and pray but Jesus' disciples do not, they keep on eating and drinking. How did they know what John's disciples did? Was it obvious that they fasted and prayed? Also at least one or two of Jesus' disciples were John's disciples. At the moment Jesus has not called the twelve but he has many who are following him. Plus, how do they know Jesus' disciples weren't fasting and praying? Was there a certain day that people fasted and Jesus' disciples ignored that? Was there a certain ritual people went through and when the Pharisees don't see Jesus' disciples doing it they assumed they are not fasting and praying? It is difficult to understand exactly how they knew what was going on with Jesus' disciples.

The whole question of fasting and praying is related to religious rituals and activities that connect us to God or earn his favor. The Pharisees believed they had to do certain righteous and religious acts in order to please God and be acceptable to him. Jesus came with a totally different way of relating to God. Jesus talked about faith in him and following him. He talked about loving God and loving people, not just doing religious actions. In fact he said doing religious actions doesn't do a thing for God!

**5:34-35** - Jesus' answer to the Pharisees' question about his disciples fasting and praying points them to him and who he is. He does not question how they know his disciples don't fast and pray like John's disciples. He basically acknowledges that the way he and his disciples practice prayer is different. What he really wants them to understand is who he is as Messiah and God. The bridegroom is here. Israel was often called God's bride and God her husband. That is how Jesus is describing himself to the Pharisees. He says while the bridegroom is here it is a time for celebration. When he leaves them then the guests will deny themselves and fast. Jesus is pointing them to a totally different way of relating to him and relating to God that substitutes true

relationship, celebration, joy and love for religious rituals. The Pharisees had a very difficult time understanding Jesus because they were so locked into their system and were convinced it was the way that was going to get them to heaven. They were convinced they were pleasing God by their observance of the Law and all their traditions, including how they fasted and prayed. Strict Pharisees would fast every Monday and Thursday. Jesus implies in the Sermon on the Mount that the Pharisees fast in such a way that everyone knows they are fasting. They make a show of it to be seen by people and so be perceived as spiritual and righteous. Jesus' disciples do not. The Pharisees are indicting Jesus' practice of his faith in God as wanting and inadequate. Jesus is telling them it is their practice that is wanting!

**5:36-39** - Jesus then tells them the parable of the new wine in old wine skins. He is saying he is God come in the flesh and the way to relate to him is by faith and obedience to Jesus personally. He calls people to follow him and submit their lives to him as Lord. There is a personal call from Jesus to be his disciple. The Pharisees hid behind their ritual and obedience to their traditions thinking that is what God wanted. Jesus is saying you can't follow your ways and rightly relate to God any longer because I have come and I am God and Messiah. You have to come to me on *MY* terms. Religious and legal rituals do not constitute a relationship with me. You have to follow me and live for my Kingdom. It is far more personal and it is all about me and not all about you and your personal legal righteousness. You have to be secure in my call of you and my love and acceptance of you and then simply do what I do; follow me and I will show you how to relate to God.

Jesus is implying the New Covenant is here and the old ways will not work anymore! In fact if you try and overlay the outdated ways of legalism the Pharisees practice with following Jesus it will tear you apart. You have to let them go completely and cast your life upon Jesus and follow him. Abandon the old and follow the new. If you want to rightly relate to God then you must heed the new way to do that from God's Messiah. He is Lord and you are not!

Luke alone adds v.39 to the saying. It is a cryptic saying and seems to imply that the Pharisees will reject the New Covenant Jesus offers because they will say the old way is better. They will not be able to abandon their legalistic ways to follow Jesus. If that is true then this phrase is prophetic and points to the increasing opposition of the Pharisees to Jesus because he became a threat to their whole religious system. Only a handful of Pharisees became his disciples, men like Joseph and Nicodemus. Legalism like a paganized version of the worship of Yahweh is a very hard thing to break and holds people captive. Jesus was trying to reach the Pharisees and challenge them to change. Ultimately they would not. They killed him in order to hold on to their religion, not knowing that by their actions they fulfilled God's plan for Jesus and sealed their own eternal fate.

## **Chapter 6:**

**6:1-2** - Luke reports another confrontation with the Pharisees and their legalism on the Sabbath. He and his disciples are going through a grain field picking off the heads of grain and eating them. The Pharisees see this as work and therefore a violation of their Sabbath rules. They accuse Jesus and his disciples of disobeying God and breaking the fifth commandment to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

**6:3-6** - Jesus gives an answer to their accusation. First he reminds them of when King David ate the consecrated bread and fed his men by it. He technically broke the Law because only the

priests were to eat that bread. Jesus is linking himself to David here and implying that he is the Messiah, the Son of David and has a right to feed his disciples. He is a higher authority than the Law of Moses.

He then directly claims to be God again. The Son of Man, meaning himself, is Lord of the Sabbath. God made the Sabbath and gave the Sabbath command. Jesus is claiming to be God just as he did with the issue of forgiveness. Jesus was incapable of violating the will of God because he was God. The disciples picking grain on the Sabbath was not a violation of the Sabbath commandment it was God's gracious provision for his disciples on the day dedicated to worship God and dedicated to being a blessing to them. The Pharisees missed the point. Plus Jesus is claiming a much greater authority than the traditions of the Pharisees which is what they are quoting to him to justify their condemnation. He is claiming the authority of David and then the authority of God himself, Lord of the Sabbath!

**6:6-11** - Luke describes yet another Sabbath confrontation with the Pharisees over the laws of the Sabbath and the traditions of the Pharisees. Jesus is teaching in a synagogue in Galilee and there is a man with a shriveled hand worshipping with him. The Pharisees are looking for a reason to accuse him and trap him. Jesus knows what they are thinking. Luke could mean that he could read their thoughts by the power of the Spirit, a gift of knowledge, or Jesus was shrewd enough to understand their plots and plans. It may be a little of both.

Jesus seizes the initiative and asks the man with the shriveled hand to stand before everyone. He then asks the Pharisees if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath, to do good and save life or destroy it. He then tells the man to stretch out his hand and he is healed instantly. The Pharisees react in rage because he has embarrassed them and trapped them in their own folly. They have lost face before the people and their response is to begin discussing not how they can trap Jesus and accuse him but how they can hurt him!

Jesus told the Pharisees what the Sabbath is all about, to do good and save life! They saw his compassion in healing the man, his good, as evil because it broke their traditions which they had developed to obey the Sabbath commands in order to be righteous before God. It was all about them but their rules pushed them away from God. They did not draw them closer. God was right before them. The inventor of the Sabbath was talking to them and all they want to do is destroy him! Legalism does not work as a way to rightly relate to God. All it does is drive us away from God and birth a terrible pride in our hearts.

**6:12-16** - Luke says it is during this time in Galilee that Jesus goes up onto a mountain all night in prayer to seek God. When he comes down in the morning he calls all his disciples to him and chooses twelve that he names apostles, sent ones. This is a shift in Jesus' ministry strategy. Before this he had many people he was teaching and who were following him. They would continue to do that but now Jesus is going to concentrate on the twelve. He will pour himself into them, in order to multiply his ministry and prepare his followers for when he is gone, for the time after his resurrection and ascension. He needed the time with his Father to be sure of who those twelve would be, even Judas. It is possible that part of the wrestling with his Father in prayer was the necessity of choosing Judas.

Luke lists the twelve. His list is slightly different than Matthew's and Mark's. Simon, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, Simon the Zealot, James the son of Alphaeus, and Judas Iscariot are all the same. Luke lists Judas son of James while Matthew lists Thaddaeus. Mark also lists Thaddaeus. They are probably the same people and Thaddaeus

was a nickname or other name to distinguish him from James son of Zebedee. When Luke repeats the list in Acts 1 he uses the same names, except for Judas who is now dead. John lists Nathaniel which is probably another name for one of the disciples, perhaps James son of Alphaeus or Bartholomew. It is curious that the four gospels do not completely agree on the names of the twelve, but given the use of nicknames by Jesus and given the fact that the main disciples like Peter, James and John are consistent throughout all four gospels, minor differences in the traditions that each gospel writer used are understandable. In the end, nothing major is changed because the lists are not in complete agreement. Jesus chose twelve after guidance from his Heavenly Father and into these twelve he now poured his time and energy.

It also needs to be noted that no one on earth would have chosen these twelve to lead a movement to change history; no one that is accept Jesus, the Son of God. They were mostly fisherman. One of the twelve is a Roman collaborator and tax collector, Matthew. Another is a member of a Jewish revolutionary sect dedicated to the overthrow of the Roman yoke, Simon the Zealot. Judas will become the traitor and the gospels hint that Jesus knew this all along but chose him because the Scriptures needed to be fulfilled. Some of these twelve like Peter, James and John will be significant leaders in the new church after the resurrection. Others like Bartholomew you never really hear about doing much of anything. Yet Jesus chose them all. He chooses ordinary people to accomplish God's extraordinary mission. He still does the same thing today!

**6:17-19** - Jesus comes down off the mountain with the twelve and Luke says a large crowd of his disciples had gathered along with people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem and even from the coastal areas of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those who were demonized Jesus healed too. Luke says everyone who was sick was healed because power was coming from Jesus and healing them all. He almost makes it sound like Jesus wasn't conscious of healing people but the power was simply radiating from him and people who were near him were healed. I don't think that's what he is trying to say but that's what it sounds like.

Was this a mixed crowd of Jews and Gentiles or is Luke reporting that Jews from north and south had come to see and hear Jesus? I think the former is more likely. However, Galilee was a mixed population of Jews and Gentiles, unlike the territory around Jerusalem which was far more dominated by Jews who would not have mixed with Gentiles. Jesus' healing ministry attracted everyone, but this crowd is most likely Jewish in nature.

Jesus comes down to a level place. Luke is introducing the setting for the Sermon on the Plain. This is very similar to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 but much shorter and slightly different in places. That leads me to believe that these are two separate incidents. Many liberal scholars declare that this is Luke's version of the same teaching and he simply puts it in a different setting. They link it to the Q source and some even say Luke's is the more primitive version because it talks about the rich and poor and Matthew spiritualized it. I think it is far more likely that Jesus said similar things in different settings and Luke and Matthew record incidents when he did that. How many times did Jesus teach the disciples about his passion and resurrection? Why is it so hard to imagine he did the same thing with the crowds who came to see him only with different subject matter? Plus, liberal scholars often think as if the oral tradition of Jesus' sayings and deeds was monolithic and there were only a few sources. Luke, who lived during this time, reports that many had written about Jesus and what he said and did. Sometimes it seems as if a theory becomes popular and scholars subscribe to it but then ignore

evidence of Scripture which contradicts it. Liberal scholarship is so quick to dismiss Scriptural accuracy and authority and ignore the cultural strengths of first century Jewish Christians. They assume that like nineteenth and twentieth century Germans people would not be able to accurately pass on what Jesus said and did and it would quickly become corrupted or changed to serve a community. They forget Bailey's maxim that says people will preserve accurately information and stories that define who that community is!

**6:20-23** - Jesus teaches the Sermon on the Plain to the disciples, just as he did the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.

Jesus opens the sermon with blessings on the poor. In Matthew it is the poor in spirit. Here in Luke it is simply the poor, probably the economic poor. These were the class of people who dominated the crowds who came to hear Jesus. These are the people he had grown up among and knew. He is one of them! Jesus was not rich or middle class he was poor.

The Kingdom of God belongs to them. If they hunger now they will be satisfied. If they weep now they will laugh. They are blessed when people hate them, exclude them and reject them as evil because of the Son of Man, because they follow Jesus. Remember this sermon is spoken to the many disciples who had gathered along with the crowds. Jesus understands the cost of following him as Messiah. He knows he does not fit into the party line of what the Messiah will be like, partly because he came to also fulfill the role of the Servant of God at the same time. Most of the Jews were not looking for the Servant nor did they connect him to the Messiah.

Jesus goes on to say rejoice and leap for joy in "that day", because your reward is great in heaven. That is how people treated the prophets. In the Kingdom's economy a lowly disciple of Jesus has the same standing with God as one of the prophets! No wonder he says rejoice.

There is an already-not yet theme to Jesus' teaching here. The poor can have the Kingdom now and someday their hunger and weeping will be satisfied. For the wealthy all they have is now; the future only brings judgment. Part of what Jesus is contradicting with his teaching here is the Pharisees' view that the rich had all the advantages in entering the Kingdom because they could give more and so earn more favor with God. Jesus says the opposite is true. The poor have all the advantages because they are totally dependent upon God already. Plus it is not about earning one's place in the Kingdom. You can't! It is about having God as Lord and not money. The rich are conflicted, and easily corrupted by their wealth and all the pleasures that it can buy in this world. The poor do not suffer from that temptation. Jesus saw money as one of the greatest spiritual dangers to his disciples. They were protected by their Jewish monotheism from the Greek and Roman pagan gods around them but not from the lure of money. That is part of the reason he speaks so strongly against the wealthy here.

**6:24-26** - Jesus reverses the blessings on the poor who inherit the Kingdom to woes on the rich who have their reward now. They have already received their comfort in this life. They have been fed and laughed and people speak well of them because of their money, status and power. Woe to them because that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets! Jesus tells the rich you are enjoying yourselves now and think you are amassing great favor from God and God has blessed you and you must be one of his favorites because of your blessing. You are wrong! Yes, your blessings come from God but they do not mean that you are eternally any better off because of them. You focus now on your wealth and think God will grant you entrance to his Kingdom because of it. You are wrong! The poor have all the advantages because they do not have anyone or anything competing for their heart's allegiance. God is Lord.

This whole line of Jesus' reasoning shoots huge holes in the health and wealth gospel today! It blows apart the Protestant work ethic of the scholastic Calvinists of the 1600 and 1700's. Jesus is very clearly saying wealth is a hindrance not a help in entering God's Kingdom and receiving his blessings. It does not mean the rich are excluded from the Kingdom. Jesus does not teach that. He is teaching that they are hindered because of their wealth. It gets in the way!

**6:27-31** - This is similar to Matthew 5-7. It would have been easy for Jesus to cross over into a Marxist class warfare mode after telling them that the poor are blessed and the rich are cursed, so hate the rich and workers of the world unite! Down with the elite and the rich! Instead Jesus says love your enemies and do good to those who hate you. Don't retaliate. Don't hate, bless. If people mistreat you, you do not have the right to mistreat them. You need to love them, agape them like God loves you. If someone tries to exploit you give back to him even more. He summarizes this section with the golden rule: treat others like you would want them to treat you. Who wants to be hated, persecuted, judged, reviled or taken advantage of? Don't do that to anyone else, even those who are your enemies. Why? He answers that in the next paragraph.

**6:32-36** - If you as a disciple only love people who love you, you haven't done anything different or lived any differently than the "sinners." They do that. Disciples are called to a higher standard, God's standard. If you only do good to those who do good to you then you are still only acting like the "sinners" act. Sinners here is probably a reference to those the Pharisees would consider sinners; people they would say could not repent and enter the Kingdom of God. Some of Jesus' disciples fit this description, namely Matthew, and certainly some of the women who followed him probably fit it as well.

He goes on to say the same thing about lending money. How should disciples act? Love your enemies and do good to those who persecute you. Give without expecting anything back. Jesus repeats himself from vv.27-31, as if to drive home the lesson. Treat people this way, love this way, give this way and your reward will be great in heaven. You will be sons of God because he is the same way. Be loving and merciful like God is. Be gracious and forgiving like your Heavenly Father. Jesus sets the standard of conduct for disciples as God. Be like him; treat people like God does. We are not to compare ourselves as Jesus' disciples to other people, sinners, the world or even ourselves. We are to compare ourselves to God. Am I more like him now than I was? That is the disciple's standard of conduct and it is all about character, being gracious, merciful, giving and forgiving like God. The Pharisees wanted to codify that and make it into a set of rules. Jesus blows that apart and makes the basis of our conduct our relationship with our Heavenly Father and with him. Without that we cannot act like God because we will not know him and who he is and we will not have his power to help us.

**6:37-38** - Jesus continues and speaks to our human penchant to judge others in order to figure out who is on the inside and who is on the outside. We judge in order to justify our own behaviors. Jesus says don't. Don't judge. Don't condemn, instead forgive and you will be forgiven. Treat others with the grace with which God has treated you. This goes to the heart of the Pharisees' system and anyone who tries to practice religion and legalism as the way to God's Kingdom. Legalism will always push us to judge others and condemn them because we will constantly be comparing ourselves to them in order to justify ourselves. We need to leave all such comparisons to God. Instead be forgiving and generous. If we are we will find great blessing from God, spilling over. This is not health and wealth kind of blessing, but spiritual

blessings as well as material from God. When we let God be God and we are simply his loving creatures who want to be like him, our lives will be blessed beyond measure! If we try and usurp God's place and be judges ourselves we will find ourselves being judged by God.

**6:39-42** - Jesus then gives several short parables, basically simple sayings that illustrate the futility of judging others and trying to take God's place.

How can a blind man lead another blind man? Won't they both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher but will be like his teacher. That is a direct slam at the rabbis of the Pharisees but it is also illustrative of who a disciple of Jesus should be like: Jesus! The Pharisees loved to quote other rabbis. Jesus simply says; follow me; do as I do; act as I act.

He then tells another version of the plank and speck parable as in Matthew 7. Legalists always will be blind to their own shortcomings, concerned about the speck in someone else's eye when they have a plank sticking out of their own! Jesus uses hyperbole to humorous effect here. The picture is absurd and Jesus presses his point home. Take care of the plank in your own eye first. Judge yourself and your own conduct before God first before you ever start judging others. If you do, the speck in your brother or sister's eye will not seem like a big issue anymore! If you don't you will be a hypocrite. Plus you will finally be able to help your brother with the speck in their eye. But now rather than point it out with pride and judgment you will do it with grace, forgiveness and humility.

**6:43-45** - Jesus outlines the way his Kingdom will work in people's lives. This language points back to the New Covenant language of Jeremiah 31. God is after a change in people's hearts not just outward deeds. Real change cannot happen from the outside in because our hearts will always sabotage our deeds and show what is truly in them. This is another indictment on the Pharisees' legalism. It cannot work because laws and rules cannot change me. Only God can change my heart. Paul would later take this concept and relate it to the Holy Spirit's work in us. Jesus would expand on it with the disciples on the night of the Lord's Supper with his abide in me teaching. In order to live as Kingdom disciples we need a change of heart, a heart transplant! I can't do that myself, only God can do that. Jesus is pointing us to our utter need before God for his help. Barth called it total help for total need. This parable points people to their need for repentance and God's help in changing and transforming their hearts. If I look at my deeds and the fruit of my life what do I see? If it is not good, I can try and obey more rules but it won't change what is on the inside of me. Only God can change that!

Jesus is also pointing out that real disciples bear fruit. They exhibit true life change, heart change. There is no way one could read this parable and still believe that everything would be ok if I accept Jesus as my personal savior and then live however I want to live. I need lifechange! Jesus wants me to bear fruit! Without that I am no true disciples of his. The next parable he tells drives this point home!

**6:46-49** - Jesus finishes his Sermon on the Plain about how disciples need to live with a final parable that is similar to the parable he gave at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7.

True disciples not only have Jesus as Lord they do what he says. They obey him! In fact if they do not then they are not his disciples. Jesus uses the Hebrew sense of hear and obey in this parable. If you hear him you will obey him. If you don't obey him then you haven't heard him! To have him as Lord and king means I do what he says and allow him to change me.

He then illustrates what that looks like with the contrast of the two men who build their houses, one on the rock and one on the sand. The one who builds on the rock is like the person who hears Jesus' words and puts them into practice, they obey him. A flood comes, which means just because we obey him does not mean difficult times will not come into our lives. The flood comes but the house still stands because it was built upon the rock. The one who hears Jesus' words and fails to obey, fails to put them into practice, is like the one who built his house upon the ground without a foundation. The flood came upon his house too, but when it came it collapsed because there was no foundation. The only sure foundation for a disciple of Jesus is to hear his words and do them. Nothing else will hold us when the storms of life come. If we think that merely lip service faith to Jesus is enough we are headed for destruction because our life house has no foundation to stand upon.

The setting of this parable like in Matthew 7 is probably the sandy bottoms of the wadis that drain down into the Sea of Galilee and the flash floods that come in the rainy season. It seems good to build one's house in the bottom of the sandy wadi in the summer because it is cool. But ultimately it is foolish. Only a house built upon the rock of Jesus and his teaching will stand.

## **Chapter 7:**

**7:1-6** - Jesus returns to Capernaum. Luke then introduces the centurion who has the slave who is ill. He has heard of Jesus and he wants him to come and heal his slave. He does not come himself to plead with Jesus but sends some of the town elders to do it for him. The elders beg Jesus to come telling him that the centurion loves the people and has built their synagogue. He deserves Jesus' help. Remarkably Jesus goes with them. He is ready to help anyone who asks!

The elders pleading with Jesus is unique because this was a Gentile and a Roman. They respect him however and appear to genuinely like the man. Luke and in fact all the gospel writers never have anything bad to say about a centurion. They were commanders of 100 troops, a century, and came to their rank through experience, unlike tribunes and higher ranks who were given their rank because of position, family and privilege.

**7:6-8** - Jesus is almost to the centurion's house when the man sends some friends to tell Jesus he is not worthy to have him come to his home. This is very Jewish and Luke is the only one who records the incident this way. Matthew has the centurion coming himself to Jesus pleading for his servant. If this is the same incident I don't know which it was that is closer to what actually happened.

The friends tell Jesus the centurion's words. Just say the word and my servant will be healed because he understands authority and he recognizes Jesus' authority to heal. The man has faith and furthermore he has pulled his friends into this incident and his faith will affect them as well. Now the friends get a chance to see Jesus in action.

**7:9-10** - Jesus is amazed at the centurion's faith! The word means to wonder at something with admiration. Our faith can affect God and God always responds to genuine faith!

Jesus is so amazed at the man's faith he turns to the crowd who is following him and exclaims that he has not found such great faith even in Israel, where you would expect to find it! This is a Gentile! The man's servant is healed by the time the friends get back to the centurion's home. Luke does not report anything Jesus said to the centurion nor to the friends whom he had sent. He merely reports the servant was healed.

What is the kind of faith the centurion had that so impressed Jesus? It was not manipulative. It was not demanding. It did not claim a promise and then say God you *HAVE* to do this. It was respectful and full of trust in Jesus. The man believed Jesus could do this for his servant. His faith recognized Jesus' authority and power as different from other men. He did not need to see Jesus act; he only needed to know that he had acted, to say the word. The man risked Jesus rejecting his request because he was a Roman and a Gentile but he was willing to do it for his servant's sake, for love's sake. His faith was humble. He knew he was not worthy, and even though he was using the kind of cultural humility that was common in Jesus' day and even today, yet there was a genuine humility to the man. All of those qualities are part of the faith of the centurion that so amazed Jesus. We need to have the same kind of faith today because it pleases the Lord!!!

**7:11-13** - Jesus, his disciples and a large crowd are following him and they come near to Nain, a town in the Jezreel Valley southeast across the valley from Nazareth. When they are approaching the town gates a funeral procession is coming out of the gates. The people are carrying the body of a man who is the only son of a widow. That means she is now alone and probably cut off from any support. Luke says Jesus is filled with compassion for her. Luke uses the verb *splagchnistha* from *splagchna*, compassion, to be moved in the intestines. He tells her and all the mourners with her don't cry.

One wonders whether Jesus had a special affinity with the woman because he had been in a similar situation with Mary his own mother. She had been a widow and Jesus had almost certainly had to pick up his father's trade in order to support his family. What would have happened to Mary if Jesus or any of his brothers and sisters had not been there? I don't know if that was in his mind at the time, but I am guessing it might have been. Jesus knew that there was no safety net for this woman. She was now alone and without support.

His compassion moves him to do something radical. He had healed the centurion's slave in response to the centurion's faith. Here he moves to raise the young man from the dead in response to the woman's grief and need. Her faith does not enter into the picture at all! Jesus heals directly from his response to his own compassion and not in response to faith. Jesus will always respond with mercy and compassion to our needs!

**7:14-15** - Jesus walks over to the coffin, touches it, which would have made him ceremonially unclean for the rest of the day, and stops the whole procession. Then he does something that no one believes he would do or can do. He tells the young dead man to get up! I'm sorry, but no one in their right mind does this, no one except Jesus! He is always in his right mind! The incredible thing is the young man sits up and begins to talk, presumably with Jesus, who then gets him out of the coffin and hands him back to his astonished and overjoyed mother!

When Elijah raised the widow's son he prayed over the body and stretched out over it. Jesus walks up to the dead man and tells him get up and he does. He raises him with a *WORD!* Jesus' word carries the power of creation because it is the very word of God. He is the Word who is God!

**7:16-17** - The crowd that followed Jesus and the crowd from Nain are all filled with awe! The Greek word is *phobos*, the fear of the Lord, and they praise God because of what Jesus has done. They proclaim him a great prophet but not Messiah as yet. They see Jesus as God come to help his people. This alone would have excited them because no prophet had been among the Jews for

400 years and they would know the prophecy that said a prophet like Moses was going to arise someday. The news spread about Jesus throughout the surrounding country and all over Judea or where the Jews lived. What Jesus did could not be kept quiet. He was being noticed by people and by people in power.

**7:18-20** - John the Baptist hears about all that Jesus is doing from his disciples. Did Andrew and the other of Jesus' disciples who used to follow John come and report to him too? Is that who told him what Jesus was doing? John is obviously confused about Jesus' mission and actions. I don't think he anticipated Jesus' teaching, preaching and healing in Galilee as the centerpiece of his mission. I think he anticipated Jesus going to Jerusalem and declaring himself openly there. Perhaps he hoped Jesus would get John out of prison. I am not sure. He missed applying Isaiah 9 and the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light, which had shined upon them. That is all about Galilee and the Messiah coming there!

The two disciples that John sends ask Jesus are you the Messiah, telling him John wants to know. Are you he or should we expect someone else? John was confused, but were there others confused as well? Certainly early on at his baptism John thought Jesus was the Messiah. Now he has doubts. Did his followers have doubts as well? Did the people? Jesus has been hailed as a prophet, and the demons have declared him the Son of God. He has claimed to be God and do only what God can do. John I think is representative of many people among the Jews who are hoping Jesus is the Messiah but they are not sure. He doesn't fit into any of their expectations! The problem is Jesus is gathering all the prophetic strands of the Old Testament; Messiah, Servant, Son of Man, Prophet like Moses, Wise Man, Priest after the order of Melchizedek, and gathering them all up into himself in order to fulfill them all. No one had ever thought of that or seen it coming. The Jews had compartmentalized the prophecies and had not clearly seen the links between all the great prophetic figures. Jesus did and he fulfilled them all!

**7:21-23** - Luke reports that when John's disciples came to Jesus with John's question about the Messiah, Jesus had been healing, casting out demons and preaching the Kingdom to the people.

Jesus answers John's question. He tells the two messengers to go back and tell John in prison, report what you have seen and heard. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news preached to them. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me. John's question is, are you the Messiah? Jesus answers yes, but on his terms, with images of the Messiah and the Servant from Isaiah. Isaiah links the Servant and the Messiah but subtly not directly. Jesus is telling John that his mission is different than John thought, yet the Kingdom is coming, judgment is at hand, but it will fall on Jesus as the Servant and sin will be paid for. John like many others did not see the necessity for the Messiah to suffer first and then enter his glory. That is one of Luke's primary purposes in writing his gospel to Theophilus, to show him that all of Jesus life, death and resurrection were fulfillment of prophecy. He is the Messiah.

**7:24-28** - Jesus speaks to the crowds about John the Baptist. He asks them what did they go out to the desert to see? What did they expect? Then Jesus identifies John as the Elijah prophet. He is a prophet, yes but he is more than that. Jesus directly quotes Malachi 3:1 that says God will send his messenger before the Messiah comes. The Jews identified that prophet as the Elijah prophet and were looking for him before the Messiah came. Jesus tells the crowds John is that prophet.

Jesus says John is the last of the prophets of the Old Covenant, the Elijah prophet, the forerunner of the Messiah. No one who has ever been born is greater than John. Yet the least of those who belong to the Kingdom, the New Covenant is greater than John because they are part of the age to come. John marks the closing of an age just as Jesus marks the beginning of the new one. The time between Jesus' resurrection and his Second Coming will be the mixing of the two ages, the birth pangs of the Messiah. For us it will be the already and the not yet, the time of the Gentiles and the preaching of the gospel to the nations, so that all may be saved who are destined for eternal life.

**7:29-30** - Luke adds the note that the people who had come to be baptized by John, even the tax collectors had repented and accepted Jesus' teaching about John. The Pharisees and experts in the Law who had not been baptized disagreed with Jesus and did not accept his teaching about John or about the Kingdom of God. The Pharisees in their pride did not believe they had anything from which to repent. They were like Paul before he was saved, who said according to the Law he was blameless!

Luke is trying to tell us that people who are baptized have repented, it is the sign of their repentance. And that baptism is always accompanied by faith in Jesus, obedience to him, and reception of his teaching authority. In baptism we have come under the claim of Jesus and his authority in our lives.

**7:31-35** - Jesus addresses his generation and what they seek. He compares them to spoiled children who no matter what happens are not happy. All they can do is complain to one another how their desires and expectations were not met. He then links the little saying about the children to John and himself. John came as a Nazarete, an aesthetic, and the Pharisees and his opponents claimed he had a demon. Jesus came enjoying the good things of life and fellowship with people, even sinners, and the same group accused him of being a drunkard and a glutton, a friend of tax collectors and sinners! They were never satisfied because neither Jesus nor John met their expectations. They had painted God into a box believing he had to act a particular way or it wasn't God, as if they understood the Almighty perfectly. When both John and Jesus didn't fit into their little boxes they declared that they couldn't be from God because they didn't fit their categories, as if they were God's judges and he had to do what they wanted him to do in their way!

Jesus concludes by saying wisdom is known by her children. In other words, look at the fruit of John's ministry and of Jesus' ministry. Look at the changed lives who now are following God by faith not by rules and Law. The obedience of faith is what counts with God not status or rules. Luke follows this saying of Jesus with the story of Simon the Pharisee and the woman who is a sinner, demonstrating the power of faith in Jesus to change us and the impotence of rules and religion.

**7:36-39** - Jesus is invited to Simon the Pharisee's home for dinner and he accepts. Jesus was not averse to accepting a Pharisee's hospitality. He dined with Pharisees and tax collectors, all who wanted to fellowship with him. He had no boundaries or excluded anyone from his presence if they wanted to be with him. This is probably in the area around Capernaum. He is reclining at table with Simon and his other guests when a woman who had a sinful reputation broke into the dinner party. Everyone in that town knew who she was and what she had done. If she were a prostitute, which seems likely, then the Pharisees would have excluded her from God's Kingdom

and forgiveness because she could not meet their criterion for repentance. She learns Jesus is at Simon's house and brings an expensive jar of perfume. Luke does not say but the implication is she must have heard Jesus' teaching and preaching about the Kingdom and about God's forgiveness for those who would repent. She saw the possibility of a new life with Jesus and she was overwhelmed with gratitude.

She breaks into the dinner party and comes to Jesus, standing behind him, she pours out the perfume on Jesus, weeps at his feet and dries his feet with her hair that she has let down. She kisses his feet as well and Jesus allows it all in a public place, in Simon's house without asking Simon's permission or telling the woman this is not appropriate behavior. He accepts her tender affections which some in the room probably interpreted as overtly sexual in nature and therefore shameful to Jesus, the woman and especially Simon the host. Even though the dinner party is inside of Simon's house this is a very public event. The whole town would know that Jesus was eating at Simon's house that day. People would gossip about who got invited to sit at table with Jesus. Are his disciples with him? Luke does not say. The fact that the woman crashed the dinner party would be all over town in moments. People might have come running to Simon's house to see what would happen. Remember village life is dull and routine and anything that happens out of the ordinary is cause for a crowd to gather and tongues to wag. Simon is being shamed by the woman and what's worse, Jesus is seeing it all! What will people think?

This is exactly how Simon sees the situation and grumbles to himself about what Jesus is doing and to the insult to Simon and his house. If Jesus were really a prophet he would know who is touching him! This woman is a sinner and cannot be part of the Kingdom of God. She cannot repent! She is unclean and needs to be excluded not included! What she is doing is embarrassing and Jesus is allowing it! Simon is judging the woman as a sinner and shameful but considers himself to be righteous before God. The problem is he is now judging Jesus and wondering at his righteousness! He is thinking of himself and not of Jesus let alone the woman and what has caused her to come to his house and publicly display such shocking affection and behavior towards Jesus.

**7:40-41** - Jesus hears Simon's grumbling about the woman and about Jesus and addresses him. I have something to say to you Simon. Literally Luke says in Greek: "Teacher, say it." You can hear Simon's anger in just the way he says the words. There is no politeness which is common in the culture. Simon is furious at Jesus for allowing the woman to do such a shameful thing to him in his house!

**7:41-43** - Jesus then tells Simon a parable. His purpose is to push Simon to make a choice about himself, about Jesus, about forgiveness and his need for it and about the woman.

Two men owed debts to a moneylender. One owed 500 *denarii*, a year and a half's wages. The other owed 50 *denarii*, about a month and half's wages. Neither could pay back the debt. The moneylender graciously cancels the debts of both, which neither deserve. They both receive grace. Jesus' question is which will love the moneylender more.

Simon grudgingly replies, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt. Jesus says you have judged correctly.

All this time the woman is weeping at Jesus' feet and drying his feet with her hair. Does she stop for a moment and listen. Luke doesn't say. The tension and drama in the room was almost certainly palpable! Simon and the guests would have known what Jesus' parable was

getting at. The question everyone was wondering about was how was Jesus going to interpret it and use it. What was Jesus now going to say to Simon?

**7:44-47** - Jesus turning towards the woman addresses Simon. His action is a tender and protective one, almost as if he is telling her I won't let them hurt you. I know who you are and what you have done and I still love and care for you. It's going to be all right.

Jesus then proceeds to compare Simon and the woman and his hospitality. Simon do you see this woman? How could he not?! When I came to your house you didn't give me water to wash my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Simon didn't even give his guest of honor the most common courtesy of a Jewish home, washing a guest's feet. He insulted Jesus as soon as he arrived. She has done what he should have done.

Simon you didn't give me the kiss of greeting but this woman hasn't stopped kissing my feet! You didn't kiss me as a friend, a guest or an equal. She has kissed me as a master and lord. She has kissed my feet in humility and submission. Simon you didn't anoint my head with oil as a sign of respect, welcome or humility on your part to have me in your home and to honor me. She has poured perfume on my feet.

Simon, except for the meal you have failed as a host and shamed your home, your village and me. This woman whom you think is shameful because of her past has done everything to me you should have done to show me honor. Therefore her many sins are forgiven because she loved much. But the one who loves little is forgiven little. No one could mistake what Jesus was saying here; Simon had loved Jesus little! Jesus turns the whole scene on its head and makes the woman whom everyone thought was the shameful one into the gracious, humble host and Simon the righteous Pharisee into the shameful one! Extraordinary! The guests' heads must have been spinning let alone Simon's. What must the woman have thought?

**7:48-50** - Jesus says directly to her, your sins are forgiven. Jesus uses the word for forgiveness that carries with it the picture of a debt being cancelled. He relates her forgiveness directly back to the parable.

The guests are shocked! How can Jesus forgive her sins? Who does he think he is? He is God, and is speaking as if he were the one to whom she owed the moral debt. He forgives her and cancels her debt. He doesn't say anything to Simon.

Jesus' final words to her are your faith has saved you, go in peace. Forgiveness is about repentance, recognizing our own sinfulness and then coming in faith to Jesus. The woman did this therefore she is forgiven. Though her sins were greater than Simon's, Jesus doesn't downplay the difference between the woman's sins and Simon's. He points it out. Simon, in his self-righteousness, doesn't see his need nor come in faith and love to Jesus. The woman does. She is forgiven; she whom everyone at the dinner party had judged as shameful and excluded. Simon remains in his sin; he whom everyone at the party thought was righteous and the one who had been offended. Jesus is the one who acts as the offended party, pointing out Simon's insults and lack of hospitality to Jesus and affirming the woman's tender humble actions toward Jesus. He is not shocked or humiliated by her actions. He doesn't take them as sexual in nature at all, even though most of the guests probably did. The point is if Jesus is not offended then we don't need to be offended! Her many sins are forgiven! He accepts her love for him and affirms her. That is what forgiveness does, it affirms us!

## **Chapter 8:**

**8:1-3** - Luke gives us more detail about how Jesus went about his early ministry in Galilee. He traveled from town to town preaching and healing, proclaiming the Kingdom of God. The twelve were with him along with some women who supported him out of their own means. Each of the women Jesus had healed in some way. Luke says Mary Magdalene had 7 demons in her that Jesus had cast out. The others who are named are Joanna, the wife of Cuza, Herod's steward and Susanna. At least some of the women would have been wealthy because they supported Jesus and his disciples with their money, which meant food and shelter for at least 15-20 people. They probably also cooked their meals and did any cleaning or other chores for Jesus. Given Jesus' character they were also probably often included into his teaching times with the twelve.

Luke's description of Mary's plight, Jesus had healed her of her demonic possession, explains much about her affection and loyalty to Jesus. She owed him her life and she was going to serve him as best she could. There was nothing romantic going on despite Dan Brown's silly speculation in *The Da Vinci Code* or the legendary Gnostic gospels. Once again writers and scholars ignore what the Scriptures actually say in favor of wild speculation. They fail to look at the data of Scripture and come up with a reasonable explanation for things!

Jesus was proclaiming the good news. The word is *karusso*, to proclaim, preach or herald. Jesus was announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God and healing people to demonstrate its presence and power. Each of the women who followed him and provided for him could testify to the truth of his preaching.

**8:4-8** - A large crowd gathers and Jesus tells them a parable that relates to the Kingdom of God which he was proclaiming to them.

He uses the picture of the farmer, which many of them were, who goes out to sow his field in the terraced hillside farms of Galilee. This kind of farm would not be in the Valley of Jezreel but on the hills above the Sea of Galilee. The soil is most shallow nearest the hillside, where a path is made to get from one field to the next. The soil is deepest at the wall furthest from the hillside where the best soil has been built up. That is where the farmer can expect the best crop. He goes out to sow his seed and then plow it in, unlike our farming practice which is to plow first and then sow the seed. He sows his seed in hope that it will grow and so he sows it everywhere he can even over the shallow ground nearest the hillside. He scatters it by hand so some of the seed invariably falls on the rocky path along the edge of the field. Jesus' listeners would know this instinctively because that is how they sowed their crops and how they farmed. That is the background to the parable. Also, the farmer knows his field. He knows where the best soil is but in order to gain the greatest crop he sows it all in the off chance that some will come up in the poorer soil. He sows because this is his family's life. If the crops fail they don't eat. So he sows out of necessity and out of hope.

The stakes are even higher in the Kingdom of God because Jesus is dealing with people's eternity. So he sows in hope that even those who are resistive to the gospel will hear and repent and be saved. But he also sows in hope knowing that there are many who will hear, receive and bear fruit for the Kingdom. Jesus knows the fields are ripe for the harvest.

**8:8** - Jesus is saying listen up! Those who are looking for the Kingdom will understand what I am saying. Those who resist God will not. If you want to follow me you will be sowing the seeds of the Kingdom. Know that some will reject it and some will hear it and fall away but many will receive the gospel and bear fruit. Don't be discouraged, keep sowing in hope!

He is also saying your job as a disciple is to sow the gospel, preach it and model it. You are not responsible for the soil's response to the seed. It is your responsibility to sow where the soil is good and ready but the growing of the seed you have no control over even in the good soil!

**8:9-10** - The disciples come to him and ask him what the parable means. Jesus' reply is unexpected, especially at the beginning. He tells them that the knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom has been given to them but to everyone else he speaks in parables. If parables were stories to obscure the gospel this would mean Jesus was trying to deliberately hide the message of the gospel. But remember parables are stories told to push the listener to make a decision about Jesus and about the Kingdom of God. The disciples have already made their choice; they have chosen to leave everything and follow Jesus. The crowds have not made that choice as yet. That is why Jesus speaks to them in parables, to bring them to the point of decision.

Jesus then quotes from *Isaiah 6:9* and Isaiah's call from God. This again can sound as if Jesus were deliberately trying to confuse people so they wouldn't repent. Instead he speaks to them in parables to show what is already in their hearts, to force them to declare for or against him and for or against the Kingdom of God. Those who are ready to repent will and those who refuse to repent and don't see their need won't. This is played out in his ongoing conflict with the Pharisees. *Luke 15* is told to them to get them to see their sinfulness and their broken relationship with the Father but they refuse to repent and follow Jesus. That is why Jesus tells them the three great parables.

**8:11-15** - Jesus goes on to explain the parable to them. The seed is God's Word but the parable is really about which soil is able to grow the seed. The ones along the path hear the gospel but their hearts are hard and the devil immediately takes away the word they hear so they refuse to repent. Those on the rocky soil or shallow soil nearest the hillside hear the word but they do not follow Jesus. I think these are people who accept Jesus as their personal savior but never become his disciple. They never submit to him as Lord and so they fall away as soon as things get difficult or God asks them to change. Their faith is too shallow. Jesus is saying here they were never saved! Those who grow in the weedy soil are saved but they never bear fruit because the cares of the world, riches and the world's pleasures choke out God's work in their lives and they never bear fruit. They do not mature and remain baby Christians. Those on the good soil, and the farmer knows where the best soil is; they mature and bear fruit. They have a noble heart and they hear the word, retain it, persevere with it and bear a great crop, a hundred fold or more.

Jesus is saying the goal of the gospel is not just people who hear it and believe, but people who hear it, persevere with it and bear fruit! Mature disciples is the goal, not decisions that produce no fruit!

He is also telling those who follow him, don't be discouraged. When you share the gospel people will respond in different ways but don't worry some will bear much fruit. And don't be discouraged if not everyone receives it. Keep sowing!

**8:16-18** - This parable of the lamp on a stand is similar to Matthew's in content but Jesus changes some details and comments and thereby completely changes the application. This is not an evangelistic witness parable like Matthew 5 but a consequences parable. When the Kingdom comes into a person's life it exposes us, our sin and true heart before God and people. It also

exposes the people around us. For the Pharisees Jesus was dangerous because he exposed their tenuous spiritual condition with God - their pride!

Jesus is also saying that when the Kingdom comes into a person's life or they are exposed to its power, that which they try and hide will be revealed. God brings our sin to light and does not allow us to hide it. That is why Jesus says consider carefully how you listen because if you think you are right with God and are not, the gospel will expose it! That is what happened with the Pharisees and the religious leaders.

This parable and how Jesus uses it also illustrates how Jesus could use the same parable in different settings and change the meaning and focus. It doesn't mean that Luke changed the setting from Matthew; it means that Jesus used the same saying in a different setting for his own purposes. Jesus is like all great teachers, when they have a great story or lesson; they use it in multiple settings in order to maximize its impact. When the gospels have Jesus saying essentially the same saying or parable in a different setting it is because he did that. It would be too simplistic to assume Jesus could only use one story in one setting and never repeat himself at all. What teacher or preacher do you know who doesn't have some favorite illustrations and uses them to great effect in different settings? Jesus does the same and that accounts for many of the differences in settings for similar sayings.

**8:19-21** - Mary and Jesus' brothers came to see him but could not because of the crowd. Someone said your mother and brothers are outside wanting to see you. Jesus replies that his mother and brothers, his true family are those who hear God's Word and do it. He is saying his true family are his faithful disciples! Kingdom ties are stronger than family ties because Kingdom ties are eternal!

It is possible that at this time Mary has questions about what Jesus is doing and is not fully supportive. It also is possible that Jesus' brothers are not yet believers and are trying to support their mother and figure a way to control Jesus and save face for the family.

**8:22-25** - Jesus encourages the disciples to go to the other side of the lake with him. They got into the boat; perhaps one of the boats Peter, James and John had used in their fishing business, and set sail. Jesus falls asleep in the boat and a squall came down on the lake. Luke is very precise in his language here because that is exactly what happens on Lake Galilee, the storms come down on the lake, accelerating down into the Rift Valley to the lake from the heights above. The storm is so severe the boat was being swamped and the disciples were in great danger. They wake him and exclaim, they are going to drown! At the Museum of the Boat you can see a typical fishing boat of the time and can see how a storm would threaten to sink them. The boat has a shallow draft and with at least 13 people in it would draw a lot of water putting the gunnels right up to the water line. Any waves would threaten to swamp them. This is probably the situation when the disciples awaken the sleeping Jesus.

Jesus gets up and rebukes the storm as if he had authority to do so and nature itself should obey his commands. The remarkable thing is, it did! The storm ceased and everything was calm. Jesus asks the disciples, where is your faith? What is he saying? You have me with you, everything is all right. This storm is nothing for me, don't be afraid.

The disciples react by asking who is this that even nature obeys him? They knew on one level but were awed and shocked on another. Just like Mary and Joseph in the infancy narratives. God had told them who Jesus was but when it was confirmed it filled them with amazement. Perhaps that is how we all are and why when God answers our prayers in miraculous ways we

are awestruck and say, I don't believe it! God did that! We are not much different than the disciples.

**8:26-29** - Jesus and the disciples reach the eastern shore of the lake after the storm. They put in at Kursi, in the Gentile region of the Gerasenes. Some manuscripts have Gadarenes, which is what Matthew has. He also has two demon possessed men rather than the one. Mark has one like Luke. Here is one of those places where you see differences in the tradition with minor details of the story changed. The essential elements remain in each of the gospel accounts.

When Jesus comes ashore he is met by a demon possessed man, a Gentile, from the town of Gerasa. The man has been possessed for a long time and has been violent and raving for many years. He went about naked and lived in the tombs which were probably caves near the lake. At Kursi today there are many caves in the limestone above the lakeshore. The demon had given the man supernatural strength and he had broken his chains that the people had put around him to hold him. He had escaped but the people had driven him out of the town away from them. That is why he stayed among the tombs.

The demon begs Jesus not to torture him and he identifies Jesus as the Son of the Most High God. Luke says Jesus had commanded the demon to come out of him. But then Jesus and the demon carry on this conversation about going into the pigs in the next few verses. It is unclear as to the timing of this. Is Luke saying that Jesus commanded the demon to leave and then it refused and debated with Jesus? Or is he saying that the demon begged Jesus not to torture him and then came the conversation at the end of which the demon left? It makes the most sense to see it as the latter.

**8:30-31** - This is the only time in the gospels where Jesus asks a demon its name. The apostles do not do that in Acts either. Apparently it was not necessary for a successful exorcism. The rest of the time Jesus simply commands the demon to leave and it does. Here they beg Jesus to not send them into the Abyss. The demon's name is Legion because they were many. Perhaps Jesus knew this and asked the demons their name or names so that all of them would come out of the man. Jesus knew their character that they are lying and devious and wanted to make sure every evil spirit was removed from the man. His concern is not only to defeat the evil spirits but to free the man and save him.

The Abyss appears to be a prison of some sort for demonic creatures where they are held until the last judgment. It is also called the Pit. However, in Revelation 9 demonic locusts are freed from the Pit and come up to afflict the unbelieving world. Satan is also bound for 1000 years during the Millennium in the Abyss. Revelation 9 says Apollyon or Abaddon is the name of the demon who is the king of the Abyss. Its name means destruction. The Beast of Revelation 17 comes up out of the Abyss. It appears the Abyss is a prison for demonic creatures awaiting final judgment at the end of history. From time to time God allows some of those demons to emerge and wreak havoc upon the earth to judge sinful humanity and to carry out God's purposes. That appears to be the case in Revelation especially. Here if the demons are sent to the Abyss it is a place they do not want to go and it is a place that puts them out of circulation and unable to oppress anyone else.

**8:32-33** - The Legion beg Jesus to let them go into a herd of pigs nearby. He gives them permission but once the demons enter the pigs the animals panic, stampede down the hillside into the lake and are drowned, trapping the demons in the pigs. Why did Jesus allow this? My guess

is the demons think they are pulling a fast one on Jesus and if they go into the pigs they can harass the people in the area and still carry out their mission. Jesus is not fooled and knows what the animals will do. Since he commanded them to go into the pigs and he has authority over them they are trapped there. When the animals drown the evil spirits are stuck in the dead pigs at the bottom of the lake until the end. Case closed. Demons lose, Jesus wins! And what's more the man is free!

**8:34-37** - The pig herders run into town to tell the people what had happened. A great crowd comes out and they find Jesus, his disciples and the man, fully clothed and in his right mind. It terrifies them and they ask Jesus to leave because they are overcome with fear. One can understand how. Here is someone who commanded the Legion of demons to leave the man whom the whole town could not control and now he was in his right mind. What kind of powerful magician or sorcerer was this? They are pagans, as is obvious from the pigs, and distrustful of Jesus and probably the man as well. Did they think Jesus has a more powerful demon or spirit in him? He did, but it was the Holy Spirit and no demon!

**8:38-39** - The man wants to go with Jesus and follow him. Who can blame him? Jesus sends the man back home to testify about God's goodness to him. He testifies about Jesus' goodness, knowing he is God. He goes back to Gerasa and shares about Jesus with his Gentile family and friends. Jesus makes an evangelist out of him because he simply tells the story of what Jesus did for him and how he delivered him from the legion of demons. He was lost, but now he is found. He was dead but now he is alive again and Jesus did that for him!

Jesus sending the man back to the Decapolis region to share about what God did for him is a pre-figuring of the Gentile mission that is to come. If Jesus only came for the Jews then he would have never healed the man and sent him back to share. Jesus is the Jewish Messiah but he is also the Savior of the whole world, for the Jew and the Greek.

**8:40-42** - Jesus returned probably to Capernaum, which was his headquarters and home for his ministry. A large crowd was there and welcomed him. Jairus, a leader in the synagogue in Capernaum came and begged Jesus to heal his 12 year old daughter who was dying. Jesus agrees and begins to walk to Jairus' house and the girl.

**8:42-44** - The crowds press in upon Jesus, his disciples, Jairus and whoever else is in his party. A woman who had suffered from bleeding for 12 years came up to him in the crowd in order to touch him, believing that if she did she would be healed. Mark adds more details in his story about her faith, primitive and magical as it is.

Luke the physician does not add Mark's comment that the woman had spent all her money on doctors and had not gotten any better. That didn't sit well with the Greek Medical Society! Hilarious!

The other thing to be aware of is the woman's condition according to the holiness codes of the Law. Any woman in her menstrual period was unclean or a woman who had continuous bleeding. Anything she touched or anyone she touched was also made unclean for the rest of that day until sunset. This would separate her from her family, especially if they were strict Jews. She would be isolated from the synagogue and would not be able to worship because she would make everyone unclean. She could not go up to the temple in Jerusalem to worship or offer a sacrifice because of her condition. So not only did her bleeding cause her physical suffering it caused her

emotional and spiritual pain as well. She was desperate to be healed and thought if she could touch Jesus his power would heal her. What did she have to lose?

**8:45-48** - The woman touches Jesus in the midst of the crowd and is healed. Jesus perceives power has gone out from him, though Luke does not tell us how. He stops and says who touched me? Peter speaks for the disciples and states the obvious, how can Jesus ask who touched me because everyone was touching him. The crowd is pressing around him and it is impossible to single out anyone for touching him. Luke says they all denied it. Are they concerned that Jesus is somehow offended by the people pressing around him and touching him, bumping in to him? That makes some sense. Perhaps Peter is trying to mitigate the situation and find a way to save face for everyone, especially if he thinks Jesus is offended because people are touching him. It is an odd response to Jesus' question.

Jesus' answer is even odder. Power has gone out from me. What did Peter and the disciples think of that? What does it mean? Did Jesus heal the woman involuntarily? Did the woman's faith cause Jesus' power to heal her? Did the Holy Spirit in Jesus heal the woman without Jesus' conscious knowledge? There are no easy answers to these questions and each answer brings a new set of problems. My best guess is the Holy Spirit was acting through Jesus knowing what was going on in the woman's heart or Jesus knew the whole time and was playing dumb in order to bring the woman to him publicly. That is also a strong possibility. If he healed her without being conscious of the action then Jesus is like a corn dispenser for pigeons in an experiment. Press the button and you get some corn. Come in faith and you get some power to heal. I don't think that is what is happening! Jesus heals as a conscious act not as an automatic response to our faith, even if it is great faith. It removes his sovereignty and freedom and makes him beholden to us. This is one of those places where Scripture needs to interpret Scripture.

However the power went out of Jesus the woman understands she can't hide anymore and she comes and confesses before Jesus. She falls at his feet trembling, probably figuring that Jesus is going to be angry because she touched him and made him unclean for the rest of the day. How is he going to heal Jairus' daughter now? He will make his whole household and his home unclean because of her! You can imagine the spiritual oppression she is under. She confesses the whole thing publicly at the feet of Jesus, preparing for the worst. She tells him how she had touched him and been instantly healed. How did she know her bleeding had stopped? Luke doesn't tell us. Jesus' response is probably not what she thought she would receive. Perhaps it was not what many in the crowd thought she should receive either. He addresses her as daughter, a title that suggests a child of Abraham. That title would restore her spiritual standing in Capernaum and her standing at the synagogue. How could Jairus, one of the synagogue rulers prevent her from worshipping on the Sabbath now? Jesus had just called her daughter, not woman but daughter. What's more important is Jesus pronounces her healed. Her faith had healed her, go in peace. Her primitive, if I just touch his robe kind of faith had healed her. Shalom, peace, was now hers from God. Everything was restored. She had her life back; her family back, her worship back and her health back all because of Jesus!

**8:49-50** - While Jesus is talking to the woman and restoring her, someone from Jairus' house comes and tells him your daughter is dead, there is no more point to having Jesus come, it's too late. Jesus hears what they are telling Jairus and tells him not to be afraid. He says, just believe and she will be healed. How do we take that statement? Is this a blanket formula for when anyone is sick, just believe and they will be healed? Or is this specific to this incident with Jairus'

daughter and is merely illustrative? I think it must be the latter. Other places in Scripture show that people got sick and even died and God did not always heal them. Yet, the principle of God responding to faith in healing is certainly present here. Faith is not always present when Jesus heals. Many times it is and many times Jesus commends people for their faith just like the woman with the bleeding. But it is not necessary for faith to be present in someone for Jesus to heal them. Think of the widow's son in Nain! Jesus is trying to encourage Jairus and his family, along with his disciples. One cannot take Jesus' statement here out of context as a blank formula like the Healing Rooms type churches do. It perverts Jesus' statement. However, one also cannot take our paltry experience of miraculous healings and completely discount what Jesus is saying as if he no longer does these sort of things. Look at Elias Malki and his ministry! Obviously Jesus still heals today in response to faith. It is a balancing act and we need to keep both things in tension.

**8:51-56** - Jesus arrives at Jairus' home and everyone is mourning and wailing over the little girl. Jesus tells the disciples to wait outside and takes Peter, James and John and the girl's parents with him to where the little girl lay inside the house. He then admonishes the friends and relatives and servants to stop wailing. The girl is not dead but sleeping.

They all laugh at Jesus, probably nervous laughter because they know the girl is dead! What were Jairus and his wife thinking at this point? They want to believe but are they wondering whether Jesus is in his right mind? He goes in to the room where the girl is lying and says to her my child get up. Luke says her spirit returned. The Greek word is her *pneuma* returned which can mean breath or spirit. The concepts were linked in Greek and in Hebrew thought just as God breathed into Adam and he became a living being. The little girl lives and stands up. Jesus says give her something to eat, probably to show she is in fact alive.

Her parents are astonished. Did they believe? I am not sure. There is no hint here from Luke that Jairus had the attitude of I knew it; I knew Jesus could heal her. It is more, I don't believe it! How did you do that? Jesus curiously orders them not to tell anyone. How could that be possible? Anyone who was at the home that day would tell the story! It would be all over Capernaum by night fall! Perhaps Jesus doesn't want the parents telling the story because people might misinterpret what happened, thinking the parents were embellishing it, that the girl wasn't really dead. I don't know. It is one of those places where Jesus invokes the concept of the Messianic secret, which only serves to spread the story more rapidly than otherwise would have happened. Perhaps that was his idea. I don't know.

## **Chapter 9:**

**9:1-2** - Jesus gives the disciples power and authority to drive out demons and heal, but he sends them to first preach the Kingdom and then heal. Proclaiming the Kingdom was the first priority as it was with Jesus. See 4:42-44. Healing and casting out demons were signs that the preaching of the Kingdom of God and the invitation to join it were true. The miracles validated the preaching and they cared for the people. They showed that the Kingdom was present and available for all who would come. Healing and casting out demons are both related to the consequences of sin and being under the rule of Satan and darkness. Jesus came to destroy the devil's works and the healing miracles and the preaching of the Kingdom are direct evidence of the reality of his mission. Jesus is now giving his mission of proclaiming and showing the Kingdom to the disciples. That is also our job as a church. We are to do the same thing. Only Jesus could pay for human sin on the cross and guarantee our resurrection through his rising

from the dead, but his mission of proclaiming, demonstrating and inviting people to God's Kingdom we are to do as well. The difference now as opposed to when the disciples were doing it is the added message of forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name.

Jesus had many disciples but he sent the twelve on the mission to preach the Kingdom and heal to do what Jesus did. In what way did he give them power and authority? Was it his own authority and thus they were using the name of Jesus to heal and cast out demons? How did he give them power? Did he extend the Holy Spirit to them on a temporary basis? Was it his own power? That doesn't synch with what Luke tells us elsewhere that Jesus did his miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit. Were they equipped for their mission like we are today as Christians or were they equipped like Old Testament prophets? Was this a special time in between the Old Covenant and the coming of the Holy Spirit in the New? This passage raises a lot of interesting questions many of which do not have good answers! I think the best explanation is that he sent them out in his name and gave permission and authority to use his name in their work. The situation for us in mission is no different. We have the name and authority of Jesus for our work as well. The difference is that we also have the Holy Spirit as Jesus did.

Luke does not say specifically but Mark and Matthew report that Jesus sent them two by two, in pairs. Mission is meant to be done in teams and is not a solo endeavor! This makes sense, especially where the Spirit is involved. Plus Jesus says in Matthew 18 that wherever two or more are gathered there he is in the midst, and when two or more agree the Lord will answer our prayers.

**9:3-6** - Jesus gives the disciples instructions in how to proceed. Basically he tells them to live off the hospitality of people who are receptive to the gospel. If the people do not welcome them then shake the dust off their feet when they leave as a witness against them. In other words the preaching and modeling of the Kingdom of God brings blessing now and salvation in the age to come for those who will receive it but judgment for those who reject it. Further, God will provide for his missionaries. If we are about the business of doing what Jesus told us to do he will provide for us. He also implies in his instructions that there will be those who reject their message and witness but there will also be those who receive it, just like the parable of the sower.

The disciples go do what Jesus told them to do, obeying him, and they are successful in preaching and healing many. When we do the mission Jesus gives us to do we will be successful. His power will be with us to accomplish that which he gives us to do. The disciples did not have this power in themselves it came from the Lord. The same is true for us today. They acted in faith and obeyed what Jesus told them. We can trust God to supply the power and ability.

The question arises about how to pray for the sick. Do we pray and ask God to heal, or should we simply pronounce healing in the name of Jesus, doing what the disciples did? The more I read the more I think we should boldly pronounce the healing, not in any dramatic way, but simply and straightforwardly expecting Jesus to respond and do what he told us to do. What has changed in his command and our mission in the last 2000 years? Nothing. What holds us back from doing as he did and doing as the disciples did? Just our faith and that is related to simply obeying Jesus and doing what he says and NOT qualifying it with our doubts or questions. The issue is simple: is Jesus' command and mission to the disciples any different than the mission he gives to us today as his disciples or was it a once in a lifetime situation? The rest of Luke's gospel and the book of Acts say there is no difference!

**9:7-9** - Jesus' ministry and his disciples' ministry of preaching and healing attracted the attention of Herod Antipas. He was confused about who Jesus was and what people were saying. He had killed John and probably thought he had eliminated the Messianic fervor John's ministry had stirred up only to find it even greater because of Jesus and what he was doing. The reports that he hears about Jesus are very similar to the reports the disciples give Jesus at Caesarea Philippi to Jesus' query about who people are saying he is. All this leads Herod to try and see Jesus. Did he secretly try and hear him or did he try and invite him to the palace? Luke does not say, but this does set up Herod's curiosity during Jesus' trial that Luke reports about in chapter 23, when Herod demands that Jesus do some miracle for him.

Luke has already told us that the Pharisees have begun seeking ways to get rid of Jesus. Now he tells us Herod wants to know more about Jesus and what he is doing. Given the paranoid nature of the Herodian family it is reasonable to assume Herod Antipas feels threatened by Jesus. If he truly is the Messiah and the true king of Israel anointed by God then Herod's days as king are almost over. No wonder in the end he wanted to get rid of him!

**9:10-11** - The disciples return and report all that they had done to Jesus; that includes Judas! Jesus knows how demanding ministry is and he takes them to a remote place to recover, to Bethsaida, which is east of Capernaum just to the north of the lake. Bethsaida is a little closer to the border of Herod Antipas' and Herod Philip's territory. Had Jesus gotten wind of Herod's interest and was positioning he and the disciples for a quick escape if needed? We don't know.

Jesus' plan to take the disciples away for a little R & R is overwhelmed by the crowds who learned where he was and their need for healing and ministry. Rather than sending them away Jesus welcomes them, preaching about the Kingdom and healing all who were sick. Jesus continually tried to have a balance in his ministry and showed the disciples how to maintain that balance, but the first priority was to help people. When the needs were present Jesus responded. The disciples surely were learning that lesson because although they were elated about what God had done through them, they must have been weary from their ministry and needed time to recover and re-energize.

**9:12-14** - Late in the day the disciples come to Jesus and try and get him to stop so that people can go and find something to eat. They explain to Jesus that they are in a remote place and there isn't anywhere to find food and lodging. It strikes me as funny that now that the disciples have had a little experience in ministry and tasted some success they suddenly become experts in how to conduct ministry and they try and give Jesus some advice about what he needs to do! They don't come with their concerns they come with advice because they now know better and it appears they think Jesus has just lost himself in ministry so much he can't see the practical problems all these people have brought!

Jesus' solution is simple; you give them something to eat. He turns it around and tells them to solve the problem since they are so concerned about it. The disciples explain they only have five loaves and two small fish and that is not enough. What does Jesus want them to do, buy food for the crowd? The other gospels tell us that they knew a year's wages wouldn't be enough to feed them all. Basically the disciples tell Jesus this is impossible! It is hilarious that they had just finished doing the impossible through the power and authority Jesus had given them and now they think they face a situation that even Jesus is unable to handle. As if to emphasize the point Luke reports that there were about five thousand men there in the crowd. He

does not tell us the numbers of women and children, which presumably were there along with the men.

Were the disciples right? Was Jesus so preoccupied with preaching to the crowd and healing the sick that he forgot what time it was and the situation at hand? I don't think so. I think he knew exactly what he was going to do but he wanted to test the disciples' response to the crisis. He wanted to expand their faith!

**9:14-17** - Jesus tells the disciples to have the people sit down in groups of fifty each. Why fifty? The only significant reference I can find to the number fifty as a group size is from *Exodus 18:21* and Jethro's counsel to Moses. One of the divisions he advises for judging the people is fifty. Did the Jews use that division in Jesus' day? I do not know. Fifty may have simply been a practical number or it could have some sort of military significance as a unit of troops. If that is the case, the number would not have been lost upon the crowd! John's gospel says that after the miracle the people wanted to make Jesus king. It is possible that the groups of fifty contributed to their fervor because it was related to a military number in Jewish thought and they saw Jesus as the one who would lead them to freedom as king. That however is only speculation.

The disciples get the people settled in groups of fifty. Jesus then takes the loaves and fishes, gives thanks, breaks them and gives them to the disciples to distribute to the people. The disciples simply distribute the miracle they do not produce the miracle, much like we do today. We are distributors of the Kingdom and its benefits to people we don't produce them. That is exactly the role the disciples had when they preached and healed. It was Jesus' authority and power that accomplished their mission through them. They simply distributed that power to the people in need. Jesus does the same thing here.

How the miracle happened none of the gospels tell us. Did the bread simply keep re-filling the baskets and the fish multiply? That seems the most likely scenario. The food never stopped until everyone ate and was satisfied! Then the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of the leftovers, one for each disciple. Were they hungry too? Of course and Jesus provided abundantly for their needs just as he had provided for the crowd. He is showing them if they follow him in ministry he will always abundantly provide and they do not need to worry. The disciples ate and were satisfied that night as well, just as they had been on the road. Whether ministering in a village or in front of thousands God will provide for the people and for us as Jesus' disciples!

**9:18-20** - We know from Matthew and Mark that this is near Caesarea Philippi. Luke introduces this section by saying once when Jesus was praying, but this is after the feeding of the 5000. John reports the people wanted to make Jesus king after this miracle but Jesus withdrew. Caesarea Philippi is in the far north on the slopes of Mt. Hermon and is in Gentile territory but also in Herod Philipp's territory outside the rule of Herod Antipas. Jesus may be cautious about Herod Antipas and what the Romans may have thought about the miracle and the talk of him being king. It wasn't his time as yet to go to Jerusalem and Jesus may be trying to avoid a confrontation and let things calm down. Luke may not have included the place or the reasons behind Jesus going so far north because it would appear suspicious to a Roman official like Theophilus. That is only speculation and trying to tie together the different gospel accounts of the incident.

Jesus asks the disciples who the crowds are saying he is. They answer the same things as Herod Antipas did in 9:7-9, John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets come back to life. The

people are not saying Jesus is Messiah as yet. They think he is John risen from the dead, which would have been miraculous, or Elijah, which also would have been miraculous or one of the prophets. They don't have any categories within which to fit Jesus. He stirs their imaginations but is at this point different from their expectations of the Messiah.

When Jesus asks the disciples who they think he is Peter replies he is the Christ, the Messiah, of God! Peter makes the great declaration that Jesus is the Messiah. Luke reports this story in a little different way than the other two Synoptic Gospels in order to emphasize that Jesus' Messiahship is different and though he is the Messiah his mission is first to be the Suffering Servant who will bring forgiveness of sins. It is all part of Luke's realized eschatology of the Kingdom and his emphasis on the coming of the Holy Spirit.

**9:21-22** - Jesus doesn't tell Peter to not say that. He doesn't scold him for being too enthusiastic. By doing so he affirms that, yes he is the Messiah. But then he warns them not to tell anyone. He goes on to give them the first prophecy of his suffering, death and resurrection. He will repeat this several times before they reach Jerusalem. Jesus is teaching them that all that the Scriptures say about him must be fulfilled, including his suffering and death. But he also introduces them to the concept that he will rise from the dead, which Isaiah details in *Isaiah 53*. Paul in *Romans 1* will declare that it is the resurrection that proves Jesus is the Messiah. He will also have direct experience of that idea on the Damascus Road.

Did the disciples understand what Jesus was saying? No, it is clear from the rest of the gospel, and in the other gospels that despite Jesus repeating this teaching the disciples did not understand until after the resurrection and Jesus' appearances to them. If he was the Messiah how could he be rejected and killed? It didn't make sense according to what they knew of the prophecies of the Messiah. And if he was the Messiah wouldn't the chief priests and elders proclaim him king, not kill him? My guess is they were elated when Peter makes his declaration and filled with joy and pride, and then immediately confused over Jesus' teaching about his death and resurrection.

Jesus was being true to the Old Testament prophecies about himself saying he must be killed and on the third day rise again but the disciples had never put them all together in that way. In fact, no Jewish rabbi had. Jesus' teaching about himself and the fate of the Messiah-Servant was unique. That is one of the chief reasons the disciples were not predisposed to believe in his rising after the crucifixion. Despite all Jesus taught them they didn't see it coming.

**9:23-27** - Jesus then continues and ties his death and suffering to anyone who wants to be his disciple. They must all take up their crosses daily and follow him. Jesus is saying we must die to ourselves each day, our agendas, desires, hopes, dreams, plans, sins, and need to be in control and submit them all to death and follow Jesus as Lord. In this way we are to lose our lives in order to find them in Jesus. This is all about Lordship and letting Jesus be Lord in our lives. Paul will later relate it to walking in the Spirit. Jesus in *John 15* will relate the concept to abiding, remaining in him like the branch and the vine. Luke emphasizes the word daily in order to let Theophilus know the process must happen every day if we are to follow Jesus. We must submit ourselves daily to him and follow his desires, hopes, dream, agendas and plans for our lives. We must allow him to be in control and not ourselves. In that way we will find life.

Jesus tells them this saying at Caesarea Philippi for the first time. He will repeat it in other settings on the way to Jerusalem to different people. Luke adds some more detail of what Jesus told them that day. He says not to die to self and live to Jesus is losing your life. What

good is it to gain the whole world (They are staying at a city named after a man who tried to do just that!) and lose one's soul? What the world has to offer is nothing compared to what God offers. What the world has to offer cannot save you, only God can!

He then goes on to say if they are ashamed of the Son of Man before people so will Jesus be ashamed of them. How did this play out in Judas' mind? Was he ashamed of Jesus or trying to control him? What is the difference, he would not submit to him as Lord? Jesus then says when he comes in his glory and the glory of the angels he will declare them as his own. Jesus actually introduces the whole of Christian eschatology to the disciples here at Caesarea Philippi. He, the Son of Man, the Messiah, will be arrested, tried and killed by the religious leaders and the Romans and then on the third day he will rise again. Someday he will come again with the angels to take up his Messianic reign on earth. Jesus shows them the already-not yet nature of God's plan. It is in that context that he then tells the disciples that there are some present who will not die before they see the Kingdom of God. The only possible meaning of Jesus' statement is the cross, the resurrection, the ascension and Pentecost bring in the Kingdom! He can't be talking about the 2nd coming here. Therefore, after Pentecost the Kingdom will be already in the world but not yet complete. Eleven of the disciples would live to see that day! All of us who are alive now and believe in Jesus are living in that day too! The Kingdom of God is here now!

**9:28** - The eight days is after Jesus' teaching about his passion and after Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah. If they were still around Caesarea Philippi then Mount Hermon is the best candidate for where the transfiguration occurs. Mark says they went up onto a high mountain. That detail alone points to Mt. Hermon.

This is another time when Jesus takes Peter, James and John, the inner three, on a special mission just with him. They were included at Jairus' house when Jesus healed the little girl. Now they are included here as Jesus goes up the mountain to pray. I don't think the three had any idea what they were about to experience.

**9:29-31** - As Jesus is praying he begins to change. His face and his clothes suddenly become as bright as a lightning strike. The veil that hides his true divine nature is removed for a moment and his divinity shines through. Jesus shines with the Shekinah glory of God!

Two men appear with him, Moses and Elijah. Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the prophet of revival and the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah. Both prophets are also miracle workers. They are the representatives of two of the major parts of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Law and the prophets. They too appear in what Luke calls glorious splendor, reflecting their status now in heaven with God, rather than Sheol, the shadowy world of the dead in the Old Testament. They speak with Jesus about his departure, meaning his death, resurrection and ascension and how he will bring it to completion in Jerusalem. Notice Luke says Jesus will bring his mission to completion; he will not be a victim of circumstances, he will be in charge. It is all part of God's plan to save the world through Jesus the Messiah, God's Son!

Was the transfiguration for Jesus or was it for the disciples? I think it was for both. Jesus needed encouragement to and confirmation to complete his mission and the two great prophets give it to him. Jesus must be the source of what they said to him, and he must have later told the disciples because they are sleepy and aren't aware of all that is happening.

**9:32-33** - The disciples are sleepy and not completely aware of all that is happening. When they wake up enough to realize what is going on they see Jesus' glory and Moses and Elijah standing

with him. How they know it is Moses and Elijah Luke does not tell us. Perhaps Jesus identified them or they were simply given supernatural knowledge to know these were the two great prophets.

Moses and Elijah begin to leave Jesus and it is then that Peter blurts out his statement about building three shelters, one for each man. Luke adds he did not know what he was saying. That is his editorial comment about Peter putting the three men on equal footing. Or it is a reference to Peter's need to say or do something even though it was inappropriate because he was frightened and circumstances were out of his control. Whatever the case, Peter's comments are foolish. Jesus is not equal to Moses and Elijah he is greater than either because he is the Messiah and God. Peter had confessed that fact eight days earlier and now it is as if he forgets it. Plus, building three shelters does no one any good at all. Was he thinking people would then make a pilgrimage to the top of the mountain to see Jesus and the two prophets? Whatever he was thinking wasn't going to work!

**9:34-36** - While Peter is proposing his goofy idea a cloud appears and envelopes them. The three are afraid as the cloud closes in. The cloud was similar to the clouds in the Old Testament that symbolize God's Shekinah glory, like the ones that descend upon the tabernacle or the temple.

A voice comes from the cloud, the voice of God. He tells them that Jesus is his Son, the chosen one. They are to listen to him! God the Father is speaking to his Son and to the three disciples. He is greater than either Moses or Elijah. Jesus is greater than the Law and the prophets because he fulfills them and transcends them. He is God.

This is the second time Jesus has heard the voice of his Father from heaven affirming him as the Son. The first was at his baptism at the beginning of his ministry and now here at the transfiguration he speaks again to reaffirm him as he sets his face to Jerusalem and his death and resurrection.

When the voice had spoken, the cloud dissipates and the three are left with Jesus alone. Luke says the disciples keep what happened with Jesus to themselves. In fact Peter does not report it until years later in *2 Peter 1*. Matthew and Mark tell us Jesus warned them not to tell anyone until he had risen from the dead, which they did not understand. Perhaps the silence is in response to Peter's blunder or to the voice from the cloud; something that is so personal you don't talk about it with anyone. Yet it confirmed Peter's confession and said that God himself affirmed Jesus as his one and only Son and Messiah.

The transfiguration is a turning point for Jesus because soon after he sets his face to Jerusalem to finish his mission. But Jerusalem means the cross and Jesus needed the encouragement and confirmation so that he could finish the reason he came to earth.

**9:37-41** - A day later Jesus and the three have come down from Mt. Hermon, and a large crowd has already found them. Are these Gentiles because they are in the area of Caesarea Philippi or are they Jews because people have followed him or is it a mixed crowd? Luke does not tell us. It seems likely that most of the crowd is Jewish but that is only speculation.

A man in the crowd begs Jesus to heal his boy who is demonized. The demon throws the boy into seizures and he foams at the mouth. The symptoms sound like epilepsy but that is our modern medical knowledge reading back into the text. Luke reports the incident as demonic and Jesus treats it as such. The father is very concerned for his boy and says the demon is destroying him. He had brought him to the disciples but they could not drive it out. This had not been too long since Jesus had sent out the disciples two by two on their mission to preach the Kingdom

and heal and drive out demons in Jesus' name. They had been successful on their mission and returned with wonder at joy. Now however they have met with failure. What were they thinking?

It is clear from Jesus' response what he is thinking. Jesus expresses frustration with the disciples and with the situation. He calls them the unbelieving and perverse generation. The description sounds a lot like Moses' description of the children of Israel in *Deuteronomy 32* at the beginning of the Song of Moses. He has described how faithful God is and then he describes Israel and says they are a warped and crooked generation for acting unfaithfully towards God. I think Jesus is describing the disciples this way. He sees them like ancient Israel and their unfaithfulness. His next line reinforces that fact. How long shall I stay with you and put up with you? The implication is he can't stay with them in his present way forever. The cross and the resurrection await him and that is why he came. That is what Moses and Elijah reinforced with him on the mountain. Then as if he wants to focus on the situation at hand he turns to the father and says bring your son here. I sense Jesus' frustration and compassion mixed up in his request to the boy's father. You can almost hear it in his voice.

What is going through the disciples' minds right then? Are they embarrassed, angry, hurt, ashamed? Perhaps all the above. What is going through the minds of Peter, James and John? Are they judgmental, shocked, ashamed for their comrades? Is there a hint of don't you guys know who this is? How can you doubt the power of his name? You can't believe what we just saw!

**9:42-43** - While the boy is coming to Jesus the demon throws him into a seizure. Jesus simply rebukes the spirit and heals the boy and gives him back to his father. Luke's description almost makes it sound like he thought there was a medical problem here along with the demon in the boy. Perhaps though, that is reading too much into Luke's phrasing. The other Synoptic writers make it clear the boy's condition was completely demonic in nature and that is how Luke sets up the story.

The crowd's response and the disciples' response point back to God. Luke says they were all amazed at the greatness of God. If this is a mixed Gentile and Jewish crowd then Jesus healing the boy points them all to the one true God. For the disciples they are reminded who Jesus is and where his power comes from. For Peter, James and John that reminder is especially powerful for they have just come down off the mountain having seen Jesus transfigured. I think Luke is reminding us who Jesus is. He can do what no one else is capable of doing because he is God.

**9:43-45** - While everyone is marveling at what Jesus did, which Luke says in the earlier part of v.43 they attributed to God, Jesus uses that opportunity to teach his disciples about his passion. He turns to his disciples and says listen carefully. He tells them that he, the Son of Man, is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. This is the first hint he has given the disciples about what Judas will do. He has told them he will suffer, die and rise again, but nothing as yet about his betrayal. Was Judas already thinking about it, or had it even entered his mind as yet? Was this knowledge Jesus had recently acquired up on the mountain or had he always known of his betrayal because of the Scriptures? I think it is the latter, but now because of his experience on the mountain and because he is about to turn towards Jerusalem in order to complete his mission of salvation Jesus is letting the disciples know what will occur beforehand in order to prepare them.

They of course don't understand what he is telling them. Luke says it was hidden from them. Is he implying that God is hiding this knowledge or is he simply saying they were too

dense to connect the prophecies to what Jesus was teaching them? I think it is the latter; they can't connect Jesus' statements to what the prophets had said was going to happen to the Messiah, including his betrayal. The verb is a perfect passive participle which implies a past action whose affects still are going on in the present. It would take the incidents themselves and the coming of the Holy Spirit to give them complete insight into God's plan. Plus their own expectations for what the Messiah was going to do and who he was clouded their understanding of Scripture and prevented them from taking it at face value; something we must guard against today. At any rate, their lack of understanding makes them afraid to ask Jesus about what he was saying so they remain ignorant and blind to what was going to take place. This is very significant because it sets up the whole premise that the disciples did not expect the resurrection and that it was only after the Spirit's coming that they truly understood all that they had experienced with Jesus.

**9:46-48** - An argument arises among the disciples as to which of them was the greatest. This would not be the last time this happened. Luke even reports it happened on the night of the Last Supper.

The disciples are concerned about position, face, gravitas and perhaps even power and prestige. Jesus, knowing this brings a little child to stand next to him. Was this the child of one of the women who followed Jesus? Was this the child of someone in the crowd or one of the other disciples who were not of the twelve? It is impossible to know but it is an intriguing detail.

Jesus says whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me, in other words his Father in heaven. The implications are huge for children's ministry as we welcome children into our midst we welcome Jesus and his Father. As we reject them we reject Jesus and the Father in heaven. Then Jesus delivers his punch-line: the greatest among you is whoever is least. That was upside down thinking and not what they had anticipated. Who was the least among the disciples; Bartholomew, James son of Alphaeus? Certainly it wasn't Peter, James or John; they were Jesus' inner three! Had they been the ones to start the argument? Jesus gives the disciples the Kingdom principle of servanthood. He came as a servant and humbled himself. They must do the same. The path to greatness in the Kingdom is not like in the world with its exercise of power and authority. The path to greatness in the Kingdom of God is to give up power, authority and position and serve others. Then you will be truly great! That is exactly what Jesus did in becoming a human being for us and dying on the cross. Jesus will reiterate that principle in a different way in the short parables to would-be disciples.

**9:49-50** - John changes the subject here perhaps because he wanted to deflect attention to his debate with the others about who was greatest. He says we saw someone casting out demons in your name who doesn't follow with us, he was not part of us and we tried to stop him. The issue for John is one of exclusivity. If the man is not part of our group of disciples then he must not be a disciple of Jesus. You have to belong to the "in group" to be part of our movement. Jesus replies, don't stop him. If he is not against you then he is for you. In other words following Jesus and being his disciple even when Jesus was on earth was not an exclusive thing. If someone was successfully using Jesus' name to heal and cast out demons then they are with Jesus, for no one could use his name successfully and not be submitted to him. His name is not magic. It is like the Jewish exorcists in Ephesus who tried to cast the demon out of the man using the name of Jesus whom Paul serves. They used the name without knowing the one to whom it belongs! You can

conclude here that Jesus is implying faith in him is key not personal contact with him. The disciples will have to learn that lesson as well.

One could also take Jesus' statement as saying if someone does not oppose Jesus he is for Jesus or can be considered an ally. I don't know if that is what he is saying. You have to take his statement out of context in order to apply it that way and I think that would be a wrong interpretation. The context involves someone using Jesus' name to do something Jesus would do but who is not a member of the immediate disciples of Jesus. I don't think you can separate Jesus' reply from that context.

**9:51-55** - This is the beginning of the Travel Narrative where Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. It appears to be a major source of Luke's gospel and contains much of the material that is unique to Luke, including most of Jesus' most beloved parables. Bailey tried to show it was arranged in a precise chiasmic structure. I am not sure I would go that far, but it does exhibit traits that show it was organized in a purposeful way. Whether this was the way Luke inherited the source or Luke himself shaped the material is impossible to tell.

The point of v.51 is that Jesus now sets his face to Jerusalem to finish his mission. This is what he had been talking about with Moses and Elijah on the mountain. The bulk of Luke's gospel material is contained in his journey to Jerusalem. This marks a turning point in the gospel because now his ministry in Galilee is finished. His route appears to be through parts of Samaria and then down to the Jordan Valley to Jericho and then up the Jericho Road to Jerusalem. This must have been in the early spring and it is possible that Jesus uses a normal pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover as his cover for traveling to the city to finish his mission. His entourage may have had some of these trappings.

Jesus begins by going through a village of the Samaritans. He sends some disciples ahead of him to prepare the way, probably to make arrangements for food and housing for the night and to prepare the people to hear his preaching or receive his healing ministry. At the end of the travel narrative in *Luke 19* he will send some disciples ahead of him to prepare the way to enter Jerusalem too. Here the Samaritans reject Jesus and do not receive him because he was going to Jerusalem. It is possible that Jesus' entourage is similar to pilgrims going to Passover and that is why the Samaritans rejected him and did not show him hospitality. He had been among the Samaritans before and many had heard his teaching and experienced his healing ministry. To reject him now was a great insult. To refuse him hospitality was shameful and disgraceful. That is probably why James and John are so incensed about their rejection and want to call down fire upon the village! They express the character of the Sons of Thunder here! They think the village deserves the judgment of fire like Elijah or Moses did! How dare these half-breeds reject God's chosen Messiah! Jesus' response probably shocked them. He rebukes them! Another later ancient text adds the explanation about the spirit they exhibit and the saying that the Son of Man did not come to judge and destroy but to save people's lives. The extra note fits the text but is not in the earliest manuscripts we have.

Jesus moves on to the next village to try and find someone who will offer them hospitality. He is rejected by the Samaritan village. He will be rejected by the leaders of the Jews in Jerusalem! Jesus knows some will reject him and some will receive him but he is going to Jerusalem to pay the price and punishment for all people's sin. Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole and with his stripes we are healed, Isaiah said. Jesus will one day come in judgment to separate those who receive and reject him. But this time the judgment that should have fallen to each of us for our sin and rebellion against God will fall on God's One and Only

Son. Jesus will take the fire from heaven of God's judgment for a sinful human race. That is why he lets pass the Samaritans' insult. Much worse is to come and this is only the first installment! Retaliation is not in God's plan; forgiveness is!

**9:57-62** - Jesus is going to Jerusalem and Luke now includes three would-be disciples and their responses to Jesus. The first comes and declares that he will follow Jesus wherever he goes. Jesus responds with a description of the difficulties of following him. He has no place to call home, no place to lay his head. Following Jesus is not going to bring him security and riches. It will bring him hardship and the likely absence of worldly things. I think of Paul and all he went through as an example. If the man believed Jesus was the Messiah then it is likely he thought power and riches and the like would be his when Jesus took up his Messianic throne. Jesus is going to Jerusalem to die and then rise again. Things are going to get much worse before they get better and he is trying to help the man realize this. Following Jesus means giving up our expectations of reward and fame. We need to be ready to go without. Following Jesus means personal sacrifice.

The second would-be disciple Jesus calls himself. He says directly to him follow me. The man calls him Lord, but then says first let me go home and bury my father. There are two possibilities in how to take the man's reply to Jesus. First, his father has recently died and he as the son has family responsibilities to make the arrangements and take care of his mother and siblings if they are living. Or second, his father is not yet dead and he is saying I will follow you when I am released from my obligation to my father, who is the highest authority in my life. In either case he calls Jesus Lord and then tells him his father is a greater Lord. Jesus will have none of it. Let the dead bury their own dead is a cryptic way to say if you call me Lord then there is no authority higher in your life than me, not even your father! No half-way obedience and allegiance will work with me. Jesus then gives him a task; go proclaim the Kingdom of God. I don't think Jesus is being cold or callous to the man's duties to his family or his widowed mother. He is saying trust me. Go proclaim the Kingdom and I will take care of your family obligations. Plus, you can't have it both ways. You can't have your father as your highest authority and claim me as Lord. If I am Lord then I must be first. This was so countercultural because in that culture there was no higher authority in a person's life than one's father and family. Following Jesus means giving that up and truly putting him first. Jesus is not saying here that family and honoring one's parents is not important or biblical. People twist this passage into saying you must leave your family and reject them to follow Jesus. He is saying they can't be higher than his Lordship.

The third would-be disciple comes and declares he will follow Jesus and he too calls him Lord like the first one who came. This is probably a chiasmic structure with the first and the last who come declaring their loyalty to Jesus and the middle one whom Jesus directly calls. In the first Jesus questions the veracity of the man's commitment to following Jesus. In the second he challenges the father's authority in the man's life. Here he challenges the man's family and their position in his life. The man states, I will follow you Lord, but first let me go say goodbye to my family. Jesus says you can't put your hand to the plow and be looking back to what was. You have to look forward to where I will take you. If you can't do that then you are not fit for service in the Kingdom of God! Either I am first, I am Lord, or something else is. Decide!

You can summarize the three mini-parables this way. Following Jesus involves personal sacrifice. Jesus must be the highest authority in a disciple's life, even more than your father. Jesus and his family of disciples must be a higher priority than your own family. They are your forever family now. There are no "but firsts" in following Jesus!

## **Chapter 10:**

**10:1** - Jesus appoints 72 or 70 other disciples to be his advance team to prepare the way for his coming in the towns and villages he will pass through on the way to Jerusalem. He sends them out two by two, not alone. They were to work in teams. That is the way mission needs to be carried out, in teams and not alone.

There is some question in the Greek text as to the exact number here in v.1 and in v.17. The NIV reads 72 as does the New Living. The NASB and the NRSV read 70. The Greek has duo, the word for two in brackets like this: [duo]. That means that duo is not attested in many manuscripts and that the confidence is not high that it should be there, yet it is in some major manuscripts. There is also the issue of the symbolic nature of the number. 70 is 7 times 10 which is a number of completion and also reflects the number of elders Moses chose in the wilderness to assist him and upon whom God poured out his Spirit. 72 is 9 times 8 which carries no symbolic significance. It is also 3 times 24 which is 3 times 12 times 2, but that is too convoluted to mean much. I think this is one of those cases when textual criticism trips over itself in following its rules which state that all things being equal the more difficult reading is to be preferred and is more likely the correct one. The problem I have with that here is it ignores the symbolic value of the number that Jesus chooses. I think it is more likely that 70 is the correct number.

Jesus chooses 70 other disciples to carry out his advance mission. This shows that mission is not just for the twelve but for all his disciples. In some respects all disciples are missionaries.

**10:2** - Jesus sees the people ripe for the harvest of the gospel. It's not that no one is ready to receive the Lord. The problem is there are not enough workers to go out and harvest. God needs workers in his harvest field! That has always been the problem. It has never been that there are too many missionaries for the limited number of unreached people. It is that there are too few to reach the many! Jesus says pray. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest fields. The first thing we need to do in responding to Jesus' concern over mission, over unreached people is to pray God would send missionaries! That holds not only globally with unreached people groups but also locally, with people right here in Spokane. We need to pray God would mobilize his people to send many into his local harvest fields.

**10:3-12** - Jesus sends the 70 in response to his command to pray for workers for the mission field. They are the answer to their own prayers! It is often the case for us today. We pray God send people and God answers you go! Jesus says to the 70, you go, with the imperative mood in Greek. Get going, move out!

Jesus' instructions are similar to his instructions to the 12 when he sent them out too. He tells them there are enemies who will oppose you. You are like lambs among wolves. The enemy will try and harass you and keep you from doing your job! Be aware of him. Implicit in Jesus' statement is the idea that he will protect them. They are his lambs and he will not let the wolves harm them.

Accept the hospitality that is given you from the gospel. Don't take anything along with you and don't stop and greet people you know on the roads. I am coming and the time is short. Bless the house you enter with God's peace and if someone who is receptive to the gospel lives there your peace will rest on him; if not it will return to you. Peace, shalom was a sign and

blessing of the Kingdom of God. As Paul says in *Romans 5* we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Eat and drink what they set before you because it is proper and right to receive your needs from the people you are serving. The worker deserves his wages. This is the principle that those who preach the gospel should receive their needs from the gospel, that is, from those to whom they preach.

Jesus tells them don't move around from house to house, trying to find the best hospitality. Don't be a burden. Stay in the same house if possible. When you are welcomed into a town, heal the sick and tell them the Kingdom of God is near you. Healing was a sign of the Kingdom and validated the 70's preaching just as it validated Jesus' preaching and the preaching of the 12. Jesus expected the 70 to not only have the power to heal the sick but to actually do it. Can you imagine what you would feel like if Jesus said to you, heal the sick? That's all, just heal the sick. I can't do that! I have no power to do that! But in Jesus' name there is great power; there is God's power to accomplish his Kingdom purposes, including healing the sick and casting out demons. It is also by God's power that we preach the gospel. It is not on our own that we do that! Preaching the gospel is as much of a miracle as healing the sick!

When you enter a town that does not welcome you, go into the streets and pronounce God's judgment on that town. Shake the dust off your feet as a sign and tell them the Kingdom of God is near! Sodom will fare better in the judgment than that town! Rejecting God's invitation to his Kingdom through his Messiah Jesus brings judgment because Jesus is the only way to salvation. He is God's way and there is no other!

**10:13-16** - Jesus pronounces woe and judgment on the towns where he has been ministering. Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are all towns near the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Remember Jesus is heading south to Jerusalem now and will not return to the region around Capernaum until after the cross and the resurrection. He is not in those towns any more. They have had their chance to receive him as Messiah and believe in his name. Some have but for the most part they have rejected him. Jesus says if the same miracles had been done in Tyre and Sidon, two pagan Phoenician cities in Lebanon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes like Nineveh in the Book of Jonah.

He singles out Capernaum and asked if it will be lifted up to the skies. No, it will be brought down to the depths, literally Hades. Today, Capernaum is nothing but a ruin with broken down walls and a few remains of houses and artifacts. It is an archeological site but it is no longer a living town. It is dead. Did some of the 70 live in any of these three towns? That is possible and perhaps that is why Jesus singles them out. The bottom line is his ministry in Galilee is over and he is moving towards the climax of his ministry in his cross and resurrection in Jerusalem!

Jesus adds a note of encouragement to the 70 and judgment to those who hear their preaching. The one who listens to you listens to me. The one who rejects you rejects me. And if you reject me you reject the one who sent me, the Father! Jesus is saying if people reject us for preaching Christ what is really happening is they are rejecting Christ. If they reject Christ they reject God. Jesus is not only *WITH* his missionaries he is *IN* his missionaries.

**10:17-20** - The 70 return and are overwhelmed with joy at the fruit of their mission and preaching. Even the demons submit to us in your name! Jesus' name carries ultimate authority in heaven, on earth and in the spiritual realm of the demons as well.

Satan is fallen and we have authority over all the forces of the enemy. Nothing of spiritual evil will harm us when we are with Jesus. We shall overcome. Other passages tell us to remain vigilant against the enemy like Ephesians 6. When we do, we overcome him in Jesus' name.

This passage raises the question of when Jesus saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Was it before creation and the fall? Was it at his baptism? Was it right as he is talking to the 70? I saw is imperfect, meaning continuous action in the past, I was seeing. Fall is an aorist participle, meaning a one-time event. I think the rest of Scripture points to Satan falling before the creation of the world or at least before the creation of human beings because otherwise *Genesis 3* makes no sense. The rebellion of heaven took place before God created human beings and Jesus saw the war and saw Satan fall from heaven. John expresses this in highly symbolic language in *Revelation 12*.

Jesus says don't rejoice over the power I have given you over the enemy. The cause for joy is that your names are written in my book of life. Eternal life and heaven with God are the things you should rejoice over! Power doesn't bring joy; a relationship with God brings joy!

**10:21** - Jesus is full of joy through the Holy Spirit over the return of the 70 and the fruit of their ministry. Jesus is God and has God's character as a native part of himself. However, he was also filled with the Holy Spirit like all Christians can be and that gave him an extra measure of connection with God. He was both God and modeled for us how Christians should act in our relationship with God through the Holy Spirit who indwells us and indwelt Jesus.

Jesus overflows with joy in the Spirit and praises the Father for revealing the Kingdom and its fruit to the 70. Jesus praises God for revealing himself to his disciples, especially those outside the 12, and hiding his Kingdom fruit from the religious leaders and the so-called wise. Outside of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea we hear of no rabbi or priest who was a disciple of Jesus in the gospels. The very ones you would expect would come to Jesus because they knew the Scriptures so well criticize him and reject him. I think that is what Jesus is expressing here. God reveals himself to ordinary people not to the learned and the wise. They are little children in their knowledge of the Scriptures and the Law compared to the wise and the priests. Paul will later echo Jesus' comments about God shaming the wise and the powerful and revealing himself to the weak.

Jesus says God the Father is pleased to do this, not because he does not love the wise and the rabbis but because the disciples of Jesus like the 70 are childlike in their openness to Jesus and what he can reveal about God while the wise and the learned are so full of pride they question Jesus and who he is. It is like the Scripture that says pride repulses God and humility draws him close to us.

**10:22** - I know the Father because Jesus chooses to reveal himself and the Father to me. You did not choose me but I chose you. All things have been committed to the Son by the Father including the plan of salvation and the revealing of God to people. The only one who truly knows the Son is the Father and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. The relationship of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father is only known through revelation and only if the Son, Jesus Christ, chooses to reveal God to us. Salvation, a right relationship with God, only comes through the gift of revelation that God gives in the gospel through his Son. We have no part in gaining any kind of saving knowledge of God on our own. We are completely dependent upon God to reveal himself which he has in Jesus and

in the gospel which proclaims and reveals him to us. That is why Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel it is the very power of God to save us. Our part is faith, to believe what the gospel says and then receive it by faith, trusting our lives to the Father through the Son. The Holy Spirit helps this process of believing and then fills us so that our relationship with God can continue and God can transform us. So from beginning to end the entire process of salvation is the work of God in us.

In context the implication is that Jesus chose to reveal God to his disciples, including the 70, and did not choose to reveal God to the rabbis and the religious leaders. Is that correct? If Jesus does not reveal the Father to someone they cannot know him. Does he purposefully not reveal him to some? Yet the Bible says God desires all to be saved. This is difficult! On the one hand Jesus' statement confirms that our salvation is all the work of God and his grace. On the other hand it hints at the fact that God chooses not to reveal himself to some and so they have no chance of being saved. Or is he saying that to hear the gospel is the revelation of the Father through the Son but not all receive the gospel? That puts the burden back on us to receive. Yet Jesus says he chooses to reveal the Father. This is a chicken or egg situation and raises issues that have no good answers.

This phrase sounds very much like things Jesus says in the gospel of John and is one of those places that demonstrate that all four gospels give us a more complete picture of Jesus and are not just fabrications of the gospel writers.

**10:23-24** - Jesus turns to his disciples; I think Luke means the 12 here and not the 70 because he adds the word privately. Jesus is back with the 12 reflecting on what has taken place with the mission of the 70.

He tells them they are blessed to see and hear what is happening. Many prophets and kings wanted to see this day, i.e. the Kingdom of God and its coming, but they did not. They only looked forward to it. The disciples are seeing and hearing it firsthand. They are experiencing the fulfillment of what the prophets foretold.

Jesus' statement reinforces Luke's already-not yet eschatology. The Kingdom is already here and not yet fulfilled. That fits the coming of the Holy Spirit which is a major component of the Kingdom and one which Luke wants to emphasize with Theophilus.

**10:25-28** - Luke gives us the setting of the parable of the Good Samaritan. A lawyer, or rabbinical expert in the Law of Moses, probably a Pharisee, comes to Jesus seeking an answer from him about how to obtain eternal life. The man is asking what he must do to inherit eternal life; still fixated on his own actions and what he can do. His understanding of salvation is works based and legalistic.

The Pharisee' rabbis were carrying on a debate at the time about the meaning of neighbor. Did it include all faithful Jews, including Gentile proselytes or was it just for faithful, full blooded Jews? In other words how big was the circle of my neighbors that I had to love? If the circle was small enough I could do it. Essentially that is what the lawyer is asking Jesus to draw. How big will you draw the neighbor circle? If it's small enough then I have a chance at gaining, earning, eternal life!

These four verses are the opening rounds of a dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer all revolving around the issue of how small is the neighbor circle. The lawyer starts with what must I do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds with what does the Law say. The lawyer rightly replies love God and love your neighbor. Jesus comes back with good answer, you know already, now go do that and live! Luke then adds, wanting to justify himself he asks another question: who is

my neighbor. This is the heart of the matter and the question he wants Jesus to answer for him. He has maneuvered Jesus into stating his position on the neighbor debate. Now the lawyer can go back and tell his colleagues where Jesus stands on the issue and gain great face before them. He is asking Jesus how small will you draw the circle.

Jesus doesn't care about the rabbis' debate because salvation is not about what you can do it is about what God can do. Their debate is meaningless because it's about a non-issue! So he tells the lawyer a parable in response to his question how big will you draw the neighbor circle. The parable is designed not so much to answer the lawyer's question as it is to push him to make a decision about the Kingdom of God, Jesus and salvation! Jesus loves him enough he wants to expose his false thinking and push him to abandon his efforts to deserve God's forgiveness. Who is maneuvering whom now?!

**10:30** - Jesus begins the parable with a man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. People knew the main road that goes from Jerusalem over the Mt. of Olives down to Jericho near the Dead Sea. Jerusalem is around 2300ft and Jericho is -1300ft. That means the road literally drops some 3600ft to reach Jericho. Literally one does go down! Further in Jesus' day the road followed one of the many wadis that run from the Jordan Valley up into the mountains above Jerusalem. The wadi is narrow and twisting, which means it was the perfect place for thieves to ambush travelers along that road and rob them. That is exactly what happens to the man in Jesus' parable. It is a situation with which the lawyer would be very familiar.

Jesus says the robbers strip the man of his clothes, beat him and leave him half dead. Half dead was a technical term in the rabbis for an injured person who is near death. The rabbis considered the half dead person as equivalent to a dead person and so by law unclean. Someone who touched a half dead person was made unclean for the remainder of the day and would lose their ritual purity for that day. This was an important issue for those trying to be perfectly ritually pure if one was going to keep the Law to the upmost. The lawyer would have understood the status of the man. Jesus is about to show him how ludicrous the Pharisees' rules really are!

**10:31-32** - A priest just happens to be traveling down the road as well, heading back to Jericho or somewhere else in that vicinity, probably heading home from his priestly rotation in Jerusalem, after serving in the temple. Culturally the priest is representing his village or town and not just himself. The whole town is honored that he serves in Jerusalem. It is entirely possible that the village gives him a donkey to use for his trip so he does not have to walk and the village gains honor and face in the sight of everyone. The priest sees the half dead man and strictly keeps the ritual Law; he passes by on the other side of the road and does not stop to help. What did the lawyer think at this point? Does he agree with the priest's actions? Is he thinking it is too bad about the half dead man but one must keep the Law completely? It is interesting speculation.

A Levite comes by the same place, sees the man and does the same thing the priest did. The Levite is probably the assistant to the priest. It is possible he is from the same town or village. He would have been the priestly assistant to do everything he could to help the priest fulfill his duties. He is behind the priest because he is walking and not riding on a donkey. Helping the man would have been a job the Levite was both expected and equipped to do, but he does not. He chooses to do what the priest does, maintain his ritual purity and so he passes by on the other side of the road and leaves the half dead man to die.

Jesus illustrates by the actions of the two men, the priest and the Levite, how callous, shallow and out of balance the legalistic system of the Pharisees had become. Many times in the Old Testament God speaks to Israel about loving justice and showing mercy. Jesus himself reiterates that theme. The prophets often speak against Israel's ritual purity that ignores the more important parts of the Law of Moses concerning how we treat people. The lawyer had quoted two of them: love God and love your neighbor! Jesus challenges his narrow, skewed interpretation of what loving God and neighbor means! The lawyer would probably agree with the priest's actions to keep his ritual purity, and yet Jesus is asking him, is this what loving your neighbor means to you? Their whole legalistic system is sick and selfish and Jesus is exposing it in the parable!

**10:33-35** - Now comes the climax and turning point of the story. A third person comes down that road, a hated Samaritan. He does what the other two would not do. He stops. He has compassion on him, Greek *splagchna*. He is moved with pity for the man's condition. He does not care about his own ritual purity; he cares about the man who is hurt and half dead. What is his ritual purity (which as a Samaritan he would not have cared about anyway) compared with the hurting man?

He goes to him and bandages his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, two things people of Jesus' day often used medicinally. He does what the Levite should have done practically caring for the man. Then he puts the man on his own donkey, which if the village had honored their priest the priest would have had. He takes him to an inn along the way and takes care of him, which the robbers had not done. They had beaten him up and left him half dead.

The next day he pays for the man's stay and care and tells the innkeeper to look after him and when he returns he will pay for anything else the man needs. The robbers stole the man's money and leave him and don't return. The Samaritan pays for the man and promises to return. Jesus tells the story in such a way that the Samaritan does exactly the opposite for the half dead man compared to the robbers, the priest and the Levite. There is a chiasmic structure to the story that turns in v.33 with the words "*But a Samaritan.*"

It must have galled the lawyer that Jesus paints the hero of his parable as a hated Samaritan whom the lawyer would have considered unclean and unable to gain eternal life!

**10:36-37** - Now Jesus presses the lawyer to confront the whole question of who is my neighbor. Which of these three, the priest, the Levite or the Samaritan, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? There is no way the lawyer can answer anything other than what he answers: the one who showed mercy on him. But he can't even bring himself to say the Samaritan. Jesus has trapped him and he knows it.

Now Jesus presses his point home and pushes the lawyer to make a choice about his own quest for eternal life. Go and do likewise! Show mercy on everyone you meet who is in need. The lawyer had come to Jesus trying to draw him into the rabbinical debate about how small the neighbor circle was so he could justify himself and earn eternal life before God. Jesus shatters his world by drawing the neighbor circle so huge he cannot possibly do it. Your neighbor is anyone in need; anyone upon whom you have compassion. Jesus turns the issue on its head and makes loving one's neighbor a heart issue, an issue of quality not quantity. The bottom line is the lawyer walks away from Jesus knowing he can never go and do perfectly enough as Jesus has said and so cannot "do" anything to inherit eternal life! He is lost without God doing something for him. He needs Jesus and the salvation he offers. His legalism is a literal dead end to God. It will kill him eternally. In some ways he, the lawyer is already half dead spiritually because of his

false understanding of salvation. He needs Jesus to save him and have compassion on him just as the Samaritan had compassion on the half dead man.

Many church fathers tried to allegorize the parable and give symbolic meaning to every detail in the story, like the oil, wine, donkey, inn, money etc. That goes way beyond the text and misses the whole point. Jesus' story is powerful enough as it is on its own merits. Plus trying to allegorize a parable violates the inner integrity of a parable. They are not allegorical stories. They are stories drawn from everyday life which push the listener to a decision and which within them have themes that we can apply today to our own lives. In the case of the Good Samaritan we don't have to do anything to dress it up. We need to go and do likewise!

Jesus confronts the lawyer's misunderstanding of salvation thinking he could earn it from God in the parable. But we miss part of his point if we think that is all Jesus is saying here. He is also illustrating what neighbor love is all about and how his disciples should respond to people in need. We dare not miss Jesus' clarion call to treat others in need with compassion as we stand in judgment over the lawyer for his foolhardy view of salvation. Disciples know they need Jesus to save them and disciples know once they are saved they are called with Jesus' help to act and do what Jesus would do; have compassion on those in need and love our neighbors as we love ourselves!

**10:38-40** - Jesus and the disciples come to Mary and Martha's home, who John says are also the sisters of Lazarus. Luke says Jesus and the disciples were on their way to Jerusalem. John says in *John 11* that Lazarus, Mary and Martha lived in Bethany outside of Jerusalem. This may be evidence that the Travel Narrative is not in exact chronological order but Luke has shaped his material for other purposes. John says Lazarus' death happened near the end of Jesus' ministry. Here Luke has Jesus visiting their home on the way to Jerusalem near the end of his ministry. It wasn't the first and only time Jesus saw his friends but I am guessing that this visit by Jesus and the disciples in *Luke 10* is not the Lazarus visit in *John 11*.

Martha goes about providing hospitality for Jesus and his friends as she was supposed to do. Mary however sits at Jesus' feet learning from the Lord and being with him. Luke says Martha is distracted by all the preparations of trying to host Jesus and feed everyone that she gets angry. She goes to Jesus and accuses him of not caring that Mary has left Martha to do all the work. She demands that Jesus order Mary to get into the kitchen and help her! She triangles through Jesus to her sister rather than going straight to Mary and telling her how she feels and working it out.

Mary does something that women were not allowed to do in that culture and time. She sits at the feet of her rabbi, Jesus and learns from him in the same way that the men were doing. Women were not allowed to be taught the Law of Moses and the finer points of the Scriptures. It was considered shameful and a waste. Women were definitely second class when it came to following a rabbi. In that sense Mary is breaking convention and Martha is upholding it. That may also be part of Martha's frustration but I have a hunch this is not the only time Mary sat at Jesus' feet. The anointing at Bethany right before Holy Week is Mary's doing as well and could have been at their home with Lazarus. This is an earlier incident that Luke places here for dramatic effect.

**10:41-42** - Jesus gently scolds Martha for triangling and for her frustration and anger. In his "Martha, Martha" you can almost hear his affection for her and for Mary. I don't think his voice is sharp here at all, I think it is gentle. He points out that she is worried about many things,

mainly all her preparations and getting everything just right for her guests. It has brought her to the point of being angry and upset. Then he says Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken from her. In other words Jesus is not going to order Mary into the kitchen to help her sister. Jesus affirms Mary's choice of sitting at Jesus' feet and learning from him.

Jack Deere adds the insight that Martha is so overwhelmed by what needs to be done that she misses Jesus in her living room! Mary sets is all aside to be with Jesus. That is the real point of the story. Imagine a conversation between the two sisters with Martha demanding Mary's help and Mary saying, Martha, Jesus is here! How can you worry about whether the house was picked up or the food is perfect? For Mary, her relationship with Jesus was first in her life. Martha loved him too but there were many other things that she was worried about that got in her way. That can happen to us all! We need Mary's sense of priorities and what is most important. Jesus affirms Mary. He gently tries to correct Martha. He is glad for her hospitality and it is appropriate to do. He does not chide her for that or for using her gifts to serve the Lord. He merely points out to her that Mary is not doing anything wrong and in fact has chosen something better.

## **Chapter 11:**

*11:1* - Jesus is praying in a certain place. The disciples are watching and observing him. When he finished one of the disciples asks him to teach them to pray like John taught his disciples. The disciples must have perceived that Jesus had a powerful and unique prayer life. My guess is they sensed the extraordinary intimacy with the Father that Jesus had and also his prayers were different than the normal Jewish prayers that they had all been taught as boys growing up. Many of the prayers they knew were wrote prayers like the collects for the day in modern liturgical churches. Some rabbi had composed them and the disciples as boys had been taught them in the synagogue school and memorized them to be used at the appropriate time and day. Jesus' prayers were different. Plus John the Baptist had taught his disciples to pray in a different way too. Andrew and at least one other of Jesus' disciples had been with John for a while. They wanted this new more intimate, personal style of prayer. Remember at this point in Jewish history the Jews saw God as almost wholly transcendent. He was sovereign and in charge but was not as personally present with them as had been the case in the past like in the Old Testament. You can see signs of this idea growing in the later Old Testament books such as Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. Jesus' way of praying must have intrigued and attracted the disciples.

*11:2-4* - In response to the disciples' request Jesus teaches them the Lord's Prayer a second time. It is probable that Matthew's version in the Sermon on the Mount was earliest and this version comes later. Some of the material in the Travel Narrative is not chronological and was inserted by Luke for content reasons. I think that is the case here. *Luke 11* seems to be prayer material that Luke gathered and put together, although it might have also been in a source that he used like the Travel Narrative and he simply used what he had.

The versions of Matthew and Luke are slightly different. Later Greek manuscripts have tried to reconcile both versions so they say exactly the same thing. The fact that Jesus gives the prayer in slightly different versions speaks to the issue of how he intended the disciples to use his model prayer. It was not, like the rabbinical prayers they knew, a prayer to be memorized and repeated every day. It was designed as an outline to their prayers. The Lord's Prayer speaks to

our priorities in prayer and the subjects of our prayers. In that sense it is a template and guide to prayer. That makes much more sense rather than seeing it as something we should repeat all the time. This version is more simple and concise than Matthew's.

Jesus begins with God the Father. We address the Father in prayer. The first priority of prayer is praise and the holiness of God's name. He is holy but he is also Father. He is our Heavenly Father. In other places Jesus uses the intimate word *Abba* for Father. Here he uses *Pater*, the formal term. Amazingly the verbs that request something of God are all in the aorist imperative, the mood of command, except for lead us not into temptation which is aorist subjunctive, the mood of contingency. My guess is the Greek verbs are expressing what in Hebrew would be a jussive, the mood of request from the king. Prayer does not order God to do anything; we request of him. Yet the imperatives here in the Lord's Prayer help us understand that we can ask boldly of our Heavenly Father to fulfill his will in our lives and in his world.

The second priority is God's Kingdom. We ask God to bring his Kingdom to its completion. This is consistent with Jesus' proclamation and his mission. The first installment of God's Kingdom is the forgiveness Jesus brings and the Holy Spirit he will give to those who believe in him. The second installment will be the final consummation of all things and the ultimate defeat of Satan and evil. We need to ask God to do these things in individual situations and in the largest sense of the term. We ask God to fulfill his Kingdom purposes for his world!

The third priority is our daily needs. Jesus uses the phrase daily bread to refer back to God giving Israel the manna each day in the wilderness as he cared for Israel. God cares for us and knows our daily needs for food etc. Jesus tells us that is an appropriate subject for prayer. It is not the first priority but it is a priority.

The fourth priority is our relationships and forgiveness. Jesus teaches us to pray for God's forgiveness of our sins, just as we forgive those who are indebted to us. Literally the words read forgive us our sins for we also forgive those who are indebted to us. Jesus teaches us to ask God for forgiveness but then reminds us in the way he asks that we need to be people of forgiveness ourselves.

The fifth and final priority in the Lord's Prayer is the aorist subjunctive; lead us not into temptation or trials, Greek *peirasmon*. Literally the words mean and do not lead us or bring us into temptation. Do we actually need to ask God not to lead us into temptation? Does God purposefully lead us to be tempted? James says he tempts no one. Yet the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. What is Jesus trying to teach us here? The fact is he does not say protect us in the midst of temptation but don't lead us into it. The phrase is actually difficult. I think it is saying we trust God to lead us always. We trust him not to lead us to a temptation that traps us and causes us to stumble. But again why would Jesus teach his disciples to pray that? Isn't that self-evident that God would not do that? The subjunctive mood, the mood of contingency, may have something to say here. This is more the idea of a request of God and not an imperative like the other verbs of the Prayer. It is possible that because of that the essence of the phrase is more a begging of God not to allow temptation to overwhelm us or for God not to abandon us in the midst of temptation. But that is not what the words literally say. It is what we want them to say. I must admit I am not sure what Jesus is trying to say here. Taken all together in context with the other requests of the Lord's Prayer about God's name and his Kingdom and trusting God to provide our needs and forgive us this request is probably about not abandoning us in temptation; leading us into it purposefully and then leaving us to our own devices. It helps us understand that sin and temptation are very real trials that are always lurking and that without God's help we cannot resist them or come out the other side of them whole and

victorious. Father, don't lead us into a trial and leave us there. Stay with us! Help us! I think that is what Jesus is getting at.

**11:5-7** - Jesus follows his teaching on the Lord's Prayer with the parable of the friend at midnight which speaks of the honor and integrity of God the Father who answers our prayers. I haven't thought of the context of the parable with the Lord's Prayer before. The idea of the integrity of God who honors his promises fits with the imperatives in the Prayer. Taken together the two teachings show that Jesus is instilling confidence in God to answer our prayers and to keep praying. He's encouraging them in prayer to have the kind of confidence that he has in the Father.

The parable paints a situation in village life. The man has a guest who has come late in the night, a traveler and friend. The man has nothing to set before him and show hospitality to his friend. He has a duty to his friend and to the whole village to show hospitality because in that culture you are not just the guest of the man but of the whole village. The village honor is at stake. Since he has nothing to share with his guest he has every right to go next door to his neighbor and ask for what he needs. Notice he doesn't knock on the door. He calls out to him. Friends call out, strangers or soldiers or someone sinister knocks. Jesus phrases the first part of this parable as a rhetorical question. Literally the words read, which one of you will have, meaning can you imagine. Can you imagine going to your friend late at night in need, explaining the problem and he answers go away, the door is shut, my family's in bed and I can't get up and give you anything? This would simply never happen! Village honor is at stake and the hospitality of the village. The friend inside would never do such a thing. Jesus' rhetorical question demands a resounding "No!" answer.

**11:8** - This is the verse where most translations and most commentators get into trouble. They make it about the wrong thing. I owe this insight to Dr. Ken Bailey and his Parables class at Fuller Theological Seminary.

The subject of the parable is the friend inside and not the man outside. That is the first thing that needs to be noted. Second, though he won't get up and give him anything because he is his friend, is about the man inside not the man outside. The NIV reads: yet because of the man's boldness or persistence, making it about the man outside. But the sentence is about the man inside. The word translated boldness or persistence literally means shamelessness and in the culture and the context means avoidance of shame. Yet to avoid shame he will get up and give him whatever he asks. That is a negative way to express the positive concept of honor. This verse is about the man inside and not the man outside the house. Jesus is teaching his disciples that God honors his promises and his name. This is not about persistence in prayer. Ask, seek, knock is about persistence in prayer as is the parable of the widow and the unjust judge but not this parable about the friend at midnight.

The friend inside will in fact get up and give the man whatever he needs. Culturally the idea of lending him three loaves of bread is just the door opener. When the neighbor actually is invited into his friend's home he will begin to ask for more so that he and his village can impress the man's guest with their hospitality. The neighbor will walk home with far more than three loaves of bread. He'll have the fine lace tablecloth and the fresh olive oil and the neighbor's best dishes and so on. In other words the friend inside will give his neighbor more than he asks for! Jesus is teaching us, that's God! Our Heavenly Father is a generous God who zealously guards his name and his honor. He moves to act for his Kingdom and we can trust him to keep his

promises and act on our behalf and his Kingdom's behalf because he loves us! If the disciples were a little shocked by the imperatives in the Lord's Prayer Jesus demonstrates with the parable of the friend at midnight that we can count on God's honor to answer our prayers. He wants to build his Kingdom. He wants to provide for our needs. He wants to forgive us our sins! He wants us to conquer sin and temptation! Ask him and he'll answer. In fact he'll give us more than we asked for! We can boldly go to God at any time and ask!

**11:9-10** - The verbs here are all present indicatives, meaning keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. This saying is about persistence in prayer and the faith and confidence to know that God will answer. Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened. Jesus says everyone who does this will find an answer. God is a God who can be trusted in prayer.

The context here is important. Jesus has given the disciples the model prayer, the Lord's Prayer full of requests framed in the imperative mood, the mood of command. He has told them of God's honor and zealotry to protect and honor his name in the parable of the friend at midnight. They are encouraged to ask God because he will give them more than they need. Now in this saying Jesus says keep on asking, seeking and knocking because you will get an answer. I think the underlying idea here is that prayer is not pestering God. We don't have to worry about God wanting us to go away. He hears and answers us. We can have confidence that he wants to hear from us and he delights in meeting our needs and granting our requests. He wants us to ask him to build his Kingdom! Taken together there is a remarkable attitude and confidence in Jesus' teaching on prayer here built around his relationship with his Father. He invites us to have that same kind of confidence because we are his disciples and we come in Jesus' name to our Heavenly Father who knows our needs and wants to meet them.

**11:11-13** - Jesus now repeats a teaching he gave in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7. Here he leaves out the bread and stone analogy and gives two analogies rather than three.

This saying is about a father's desire to give good gifts to his children and comparing us as earthly fathers to our Heavenly Father.

If your son asks for a fish will we give him a snake instead? There are eel-like fishes in the waters around Israel and some have said that is the comparison. If he asks for an egg will you give him a scorpion? When the white scorpions curl up under rocks they look a little like an egg. The point is we would never try and fool or switch something evil or hurtful for the legitimate thing our children ask of us. Jesus is telling us God is not a trickster he can be trusted. The pagan gods were not this way. You never knew what they would do! You couldn't trust their character. You can trust God's character and integrity! If we know how to give good gifts to our children, we who are sinful, how much more our Heavenly Father will give us his Holy Spirit to those who ask him! Jesus intensifies the good gifts God will give us by saying he will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. The Spirit is the greatest gift of all and was a sign of the Kingdom's presence and life. People might ask God for the Spirit but he was not ready to give him because the Spirit is given to all only when the Messiah comes and God's Kingdom is present in the world. Jesus is saying the time has come. Ask for his Holy Spirit and God will give him because I am here and I am the Messiah. The Kingdom of God has come! It is interesting that Jesus begins his teaching on prayer with the Lord's Prayer and his imperative request of God to bring his Kingdom. At the end of his teaching he tells the disciples that the Kingdom is here because

they can ask the Father and he will give the Holy Spirit, the very sign of the Kingdom to all those who ask him!

Luke may have pulled this material from several sources and put it together in a masterful way, but the inner unity of the teaching on prayer suggests to me that this is precisely how Jesus taught it and Luke simply puts it in the context of his Travel Narrative.

**11:14-16** - Jesus casts a demon out of a man that had caused him to be mute. This is one of those times when a demon causes some physical malady, here the inability to speak. The demon leaves and people are amazed. Some among them, in Mark and Matthew it is the Pharisees, claim he is casting out demons by Beelzebub or Baalzebub, the prince of demons. Beelzebub literally means lord of the flies and was one of the highest demons under Satan or another name for Satan in Jewish tradition. One wonders whether the Jews who criticized him had tried to cast out demons before and had failed miserably and now that Jesus did it with such ease they could not bring themselves to say that he did it by the power of God because they had tried that and failed. The only alternative for them was to claim that he did it by Satan's power. They were so wrapped up in their own religious position that they called the work of God the work of the devil.

Luke adds that others wanted to test him asking for a sign. People wanted Jesus to do some miraculous thing so that he could prove to their satisfaction that he was Messiah or a prophet. Luke shows us three types of people in the crowd. The open, who are amazed at what he does; the hostile who think he uses Satan and the skeptics who demand proof on their own terms before they will believe. In the next few paragraphs Jesus will answer the hostile and the skeptics.

**11:17-20** - Jesus knows the hostile peoples' thoughts and answers them, showing their logic to be faulty. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. It will be ruined. Jesus shows them he is not casting out demons by Satan because his kingdom would not stand; it would be divided against itself. Their arguments are ludicrous and baseless.

However, he then asks if it is not Satan then by what power do I cast out demons? If it is by the finger of God, meaning the power of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. The finger of God is an expression the court magicians used with Pharaoh to describe the plague of gnats in Egypt in *Exodus 8*. They could not duplicate it and so realized a power greater than their own magic was at work. The interesting thing is Pharaoh would not listen and hardened his heart even further against the Israelites. Jesus casts out demons with the power of God, the same power used in the plagues against Egypt and like Pharaoh, the hostile in the crowd, especially the Pharisees, are in danger of hardening their hearts against God's Messiah and against God. They continue to see God's work as the devil's work!

Jesus indicts the Pharisees' exorcists. If he casts out demons by the devil then with what power do the Pharisees cast them out? If it is by the power of God then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. If the Kingdom is here then Jesus is the agent of that Kingdom. He is the Messiah!

**11:21-22** - Jesus then tells the parable of the strongman to push the hostile and the Pharisees to recognize what is really happening and to shake them out of their ridiculous position. Someone stronger than a strongman who is guarding his house has come. His protection is taken and his house is plundered. Jesus is stronger than Satan because the demons cannot do anything to stop him from casting them out. His authority and power are greater! Jesus presses them to believe

the evidence of their own eyes and abandon the ridiculous notion that he is working for the enemy!

**11:23** - The one who is not with me, is against me and the one who does not gather with me scatters. Jesus indicts the hostile in the crowd, most probably the Pharisees, and tells them they have a choice. He is the Messiah and they are on the wrong side! They will find themselves standing against God's Messiah, standing against God himself, if they do not repent and give up their hostility towards Jesus. A handful did, but the gospels show the majority of the Pharisees increased their hostility to Jesus and succeeded in their plots to kill him. The problem was his death was God's plan and they did not foresee the resurrection which totally proved Jesus' point that they were opposing God!

**11:24-26** - This is a difficult parable. In context it is told to the hostile crowd, the Pharisees and religious leaders. There are several possibilities. First, Jesus is speaking to what happens to a person the Pharisees have healed by casting out a demon. They have replaced the demon in the man with nothing because all they have is the Law which does not change hearts. When the demon tries to come back it brings with it more wicked spirits than itself and the second state of the man is far worse than the first state. This is possible but seems pretty obscure and not a very clear way to make the point. The Pharisees are spiritually barren and have nothing to offer.

Second, Jesus is speaking to the need for following him to someone who has been cured of a demon. If people who are healed do not follow Jesus then they risk a worse condition than before. The problem is the context gives no clues that Jesus is now changing the subject and speaking to someone he healed rather than to the hostile crowd and Pharisees. If this is what the parable is about it would be confusing at best to the Pharisees listening to it and I am not sure the man who was mute would realize Jesus was speaking to him.

Third, Jesus may be referring to all Israel. Jesus' coming has swept clean the house of Israel but if they refuse to follow him and receive him as Messiah then greater evil will come back in and their last state will be worse than their first state before Jesus came. The parable is corporate in nature and prophetic to Israel. Certainly events played out this way with the Jewish revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 by the Romans. This interpretation makes the most sense of what Jesus is talking about but does it fit the context? Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and the religious leaders here who accuse him of being in league with Satan. He quotes the finger of God phrase from Exodus 8 which reminds them of God's deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery. The problem is Jesus uses an individual as an example and not a corporate example in the parable. I tend to lean towards this third interpretation but it has its share of problems. Perhaps Jesus meant to speak to several different groups and individuals at once in the parable which makes it more difficult to interpret. I do not know.

**11:27-28** - As Jesus is saying these things a woman cries out in the crowd a blessing on Jesus' mother Mary. She is trying to call attention to what a woman could do and seeking to give herself and other women value since in that culture the Pharisees had said a woman should not even be taught the Scriptures. Jesus refuses to accept the blessing on Mary as a way to increase her value. Instead he points to what all people can do, men and women, hear the Word and obey it! In doing so he says that women and men can hear and learn the Word from him and obey it. Women are not relegated to being content with birthing children and nursing them. They can be full disciples of his which is a radical view.

On a side note, Jesus rejects the blessing on Mary the woman wanted to give. He refuses to elevate Mary to any other status but one of his followers. The key to Mary's character was that she did exactly what Jesus says his disciples should do; hear the Word of God and do it. Mary is blessed because she did that and is an example for all disciples of her obedience, not because she has special blessing by being Jesus' mother. Here the Catholic Church ignore Jesus' response to the woman and want to elevate Mary to semi-god status because of her special relationship with Jesus.

**11:29-32** - As Jesus is speaking a larger crowd gathers. Jesus now addresses the skeptics among the crowds; see back to *11:16* and those who wanted a sign from him to prove his Messiahship.

Jesus calls them a wicked generation because they ask Jesus to prove himself to them by doing some miracle. They were sitting in judgment over the Messiah and over God! They were saying Jesus has to measure up to their expectations and fit into what they want as Messiah or they won't believe in him. The Messiah is not beholden to us we are beholden to him! They did not understand that they were the ones being judged. The sign of Jonah Jesus speaks of is the resurrection. It is the one sign or event that will show whether the people will recognize Jesus as Messiah or not. Notice Jesus does not point to his cross here but his resurrection. As Paul says in Romans 1 it is the resurrection through the power of the Holy Spirit that proves Jesus is the Messiah and the Lord.

Jesus then says one greater than the wise teachers like Solomon is speaking to them. The Queen of Sheba will testify against this generation at the judgment because they did not believe. One greater than the prophet Jonah is speaking to them. The Ninevites will testify at the judgment against them because the city repented at Jonah's preaching but this people will not. Jesus is claiming to be greater than the wisdom teachers and the prophets. What did the skeptical crowds do with his words? How did they respond?

**11:33-36** - Jesus then repeats the light under the bushel saying only he gives it a different meaning than in the Sermon on the Mount in *Matthew 5*. Here he uses it to speak to what they watch and see. We don't hide a light but let it shine. Your eyes are the light of your body. When you watch and look at what is good your whole body will be healthy but when you watch and focus on what is evil your body will be dark. Jesus is saying what you see and watch affects your whole being! How true that is especially today! Notice Jesus also says when our eyes are light and our whole body is light then we shine out with the light of God to others!

My question is how does this saying relate in the context in which Luke puts it? Why here? He has been speaking to those who oppose him directly and to those who are skeptical in the crowds. I think he is saying that they are watching and looking for the wrong things. Their self-centered standards as to what the Messiah should be like and how he should fit into their religious program and rules have their eyes focused on darkness and because of that their whole bodies, meaning selves, are dark. They cannot see the light and so be saved. They are living in darkness and need to change their focus off of themselves and onto Jesus and his light. Jesus is using the saying and its metaphor to challenge them and call them to repentance.

**11:37-38** - Jesus is invited to a Pharisee's home for dinner and he accepts the invitation. The Pharisee notices that Jesus does not wash before the meal. Mark comments in *Mark 7* that this washing was ceremonial. It was not the same as we would do when we ask our children to wash their hands before dinner, which is not ceremonial but hygienic. It's not as if Jesus was filthy and

is showing us never wash your hands before meals. He simply did not follow the Pharisee's ceremonial cleanliness ritual before he ate the meal. This was part of the Pharisees' tradition and not in the Law of Moses. The Law stipulated ceremonial washings when entering the tabernacle or temple for the priests or after touching a dead body and other holiness issues but in no place does it say to wash the hands before one eats. The Pharisees had added this rule to their traditions. Jesus deliberately violates it and then proceeds to pronounce judgment upon the Pharisee and all his brothers as he is reclining at the table with his host. This was a violation of the rules of hospitality and shamed his host. Culturally Jesus is being rude and shocking! Spiritually he is lovingly confronting the Pharisee to try and shake him out of his rules and legalism in order to save him.

**11:39-41** - Jesus attacks their legalistic religion as futile. They concentrate on the outside of things, their bodies and their dishes and worry about whether things are ritually clean or not yet they neglect what the prophets said and Jesus will say in a few moments, the weightier things of the law like justice and mercy for the poor. The fruit of their lives does not coincide with their religious efforts! The outside is clean but their hearts are hard and proud! They are full of greed and wickedness. Jesus calls them fools for not recognizing it is what is on the inside that counts. All their religious actions are done for the wrong reasons. Plus they don't work! Their rituals can't change their hearts. They need something different. They need a relationship with Jesus!  
**11:42-44** - Jesus then pronounces three woes or three judgments against the Pharisees. He does this while he is reclining at the table with them!

The first woe concerns their tithing. Jesus says they are so careful to tithe even their garden herbs to God which he says is not wrong. But they ignore justice and loving God when they do it. In other words they tithe for all the wrong reasons thinking it is pleasing God and earning his favor when all along their hearts are hard and proud, they are far from God.

This saying is given to the Pharisees and not the disciples thus one cannot use this verse as is often done to justify and affirm tithing as the giving standard for Jesus' disciples. To do that would be to take this verse totally out of context and to miss the point Jesus is trying to make all together!

The second woe speaks to their pride and lack of humility. They want the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the market place. Their actions speak to their pride before people and that speaks to their self-righteousness before God. God is repulsed by it! Jesus is Messiah and God. He is repulsed by their pride and speaks against it but they are so arrogant that they cannot accept his words of correction nor can they recognize their Messiah and Lord before them!

The third woe speaks to their dead hearts. To walk over a grave in their religious system would make one unclean for the rest of the day. Jesus tells them that the people who associate with the Pharisees are made unclean by being around them. They corrupt others with their spiritual rules and self-righteousness. Far from helping people find God they make people unclean before God! Legalism and rules do not honor God and they do not bring us close to God. They do the opposite; they separate us from our Heavenly Father.

This was beyond their comprehension because they believed God was pleased with them because of their ritual purity and scrupulous attention to the tiniest detail of God's Law. In fact the Pharisees believed that if they all could keep the Law perfectly for one day then God would send the Messiah. God had sent the Messiah and he was eating with them and speaking to them and he was repulsed by them and called them to repent! They couldn't see it and rejected him!

**11:45** - The comment by the lawyer seems to point to the fact that he thought Jesus was just talking about the lay Pharisees who did not spend full time studying the Law. The lawyer could have been a rabbi or one who taught others. He realizes that Jesus is including them as well in his condemnation of the Pharisees. Jesus now turns to the scholars among the guests around the table and indicts them too.

**11:46** - Jesus condemns the scholars because they add more and more regulations to their legal requirements but don't help people try and keep them or counsel them how to balance them out in their lives. They are legalists and are obsessed with their rules. They are like bureaucrats who only know how to write more regulations and don't seem to understand how contradictory or confusing they can become. Underneath it all Jesus is telling them their legalism is no way to salvation. All the Law can do is add more and more burden. It cannot rightly relate us to God nor change our character and change our hearts. The Law is a dead end and Jesus is trying to show them they are at risk for their salvation; the very ones who think they are pleasing God by their strict rules.

**11:47-51** - Jesus then indicts the scholars and lawyers among the Pharisees for being hypocrites when it comes to God's prophets. They build tombs to the prophets but end up thereby approving their murders and persecution. God had foreseen it and told you this would happen. This generation will be held responsible for the blood of the martyred prophets because they all pointed to Jesus and they would reject him. Jesus links the scholars to the people in Israel who silenced and killed God's prophets in the days of the kings. They were the ones who listened to the false prophets God condemned and said he never sent and never spoke through them.

Jesus says they will be guilty of all the prophets from the blood of Abel to Zechariah who was killed in the temple courts between the altar and the sanctuary. The Scriptures do not tell us about this incident. However the prophet Zechariah is the son of Berechiah which Jesus mentions in Matthew in the seven woes against the Pharisees in the temple during Holy Week. It is most likely that Jesus is speaking of the prophet Zechariah here. If that is the case then the reference is probably like saying from Genesis to Revelation, from the beginning to the ending of the Scriptures you have always killed the prophets God sent and opposed God's plan and will. Abel was killed by his wicked brother Cain and Jesus is equating this generation of scholars with Cain!

**11:52-53** - Jesus' sixth woe indicts the Pharisees and their scholars concerning their teaching of salvation. They have taken away the key to God's knowledge, a relationship with God through Jesus. They resist and oppose him and hinder those who want to follow Jesus. The scholars and rabbis among the Pharisees have taught the rest of the Pharisees and the people a legal way of salvation that is a dead end and cannot result in salvation for anyone. They then have hindered Jesus in his preaching of the Kingdom and a relationship with him as Lord and Messiah, the only true way to know God and enter God's Kingdom! Jesus is telling them they know the truth but reject it, hinder it and teach people a different way that doesn't work and denies the truth! God will judge them for it.

When Jesus left the dinner party the Pharisees and scholars increased their opposition and attacks upon Jesus. They tried all the harder to trap him into saying something wrong like the media with a candidate they oppose or like sharks with blood in the water, hoping he would say

something they could use against him. They want to be rid of him because he indicted them before God and he is God and their Messiah! Their prideful hearts could not accept Jesus' rebuke and the truth about the religious system they had developed. Preserving it and preserving their power and prestige with the people was more important than a real relationship with God through Jesus as Messiah. Thus God would ultimately judge them on the cross, paying for their sins, and in 70 for rejecting the only way to God. He would take their country and their temple from them and send many of them into slavery and exile for rejecting his Son!

**12:1** - After Jesus left the Pharisee's dinner party a huge crowd gathers. It is so large that the people are trampling one another to get close to Jesus. He begins to speak to his disciples first and then later to the crowd.

He starts off with a warning about the Pharisees whom he has just left. Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees. Here he uses yeast in a negative Old Testament sense as any influence that can lead us to sin. He calls their hypocrisy their yeast. They claim to be righteous and beloved of God but their hearts are far from him. Their righteousness is only outward righteousness and not a true heart for God. It is all on the surface. Jesus warns us about the dangers of the legalistic religious path to God. It leads nowhere and only serves to alienate one from God not draw them closer.

## **Chapter 12:**

**12:2-3** - Jesus seems to change the subject mid-paragraph and talk about things that are secret being made known. It does not readily connect with the phrase about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, unless Jesus is further warning the Pharisees and the disciples that our hypocrisy will be found out. We cannot live double lives and expect God to remain silent. What we have done in secret is not secret to God. What we have whispered in the dark will be brought out into the light of day. I think he is both saying that God will expose our sin no matter how hard we try and hide it and he is saying that at the judgment all our secret sins will be exposed for all to see. Any hypocrisy in us will be shown for what it is when Jesus judges the world. If that is the case he is warning the disciples not to participate in the Pharisees' hypocrisy because it will be shameful for them in the judgment. All their outward righteousness will be shown up for what it is; a cover for their pride, greed and sin. They will be exposed and rejected by God not welcomed into his Kingdom because they are not righteous they are corrupted. Righteousness is a matter of the heart and our relationship with God not a matter of external obedience to a ritual code like the Pharisees.

This paragraph also serves as a warning to us. Don't hide your sin, confess it. God will expose it because he loves us and he wants to transform us. He is our Lord and not sin. He is a jealous God and brooks no rival for our heart's allegiance. He will not remain inactive when sin threatens to take us over. He will expose us in order to save us!

**12:4-7** - Jesus then goes on to talk about the one we should truly fear and reverence. It should be the Lord God because he can throw body and soul into hell and has the power to destroy us utterly. We should not fear those who can merely kill the body, meaning any human power like the Pharisees or Herod or the Romans. We should fear God.

Jesus then points out how greatly God loves us and values us. God knows about the sparrows and cares for them. How much more will he care for us? Even the very hairs on our

heads are numbered by him. We should be in awe of God and worship him but we don't need to be in terror of him because he loves us! We matter to him!

**12:8-10** - Jesus then speaks of what happens when we stand up for Jesus and acknowledge him before people. He will acknowledge us before God and his angels. But whoever denies Jesus before others he will deny before his angels in heaven. If we confess Jesus here on earth he will confess us as his own in heaven. If we deny him here on earth he will deny knowing us in heaven as well.

Jesus then outlines the unforgivable sin, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. If we blaspheme Jesus, the Son of Man, there is still forgiveness because he pays for all our sins. If we blaspheme the Spirit no forgiveness remains because he is the one who draws us to Jesus so that we might experience forgiveness. If we refuse his work in our lives then there is no hope of salvation left. We cannot come to God on our own. We are incapable. The Holy Spirit must draw us and invite us to faith. Without him we are hopeless. To deny him, blaspheme him, and reject his work in us is to reject the one thing that can save us. Thus blasphemy against the Spirit cannot be forgiven because it blocks the very path to forgiveness in the first place. This is what the Pharisees were doing. They were calling the work of the Spirit in Jesus the work of Satan. They were rejecting Jesus and rejecting the Spirit's drawing them to Jesus. Ultimately there was no hope for them and their fate was sealed.

When does a person reach that point? Only God knows but to continually reject the Spirit's work puts my eternity in jeopardy.

**12:11-12** - Jesus then affirms the Spirit's work in the disciples. When they are hauled before the authorities to testify about Jesus they don't need to worry about what to say or how to defend themselves. The Spirit of God will give them the very words to say in that hour. We see this played out in the Book of Acts as Peter and John are hauled before the Sanhedrin. They realize that Peter and John are uneducated fishermen from Galilee yet they are stymied by their eloquence and wisdom and question where it comes from. Luke is showing us the Spirit gave them the words just as Jesus had promised. Paul experiences the same thing in front of the Sanhedrin when he pleads he is on trial for the resurrection of the dead and before Felix and Festus and Herod Agrippa II. God keeps his promises and we don't need to be worried or afraid. He is our defense attorney and advocate. He is the Paraclete!

Today if we are faced with speaking to a hostile media or authorities or people who oppose us Jesus' promise stands. The Spirit will give us the words to say and confound the enemies of God. He will also give us words to say that will penetrate hearts and draw people to himself whose hearts are open to the gospel. I experienced that in Africa the first time when I preached the gospel at the crusade. I felt God giving me the words and guiding what I said.

**12:13-15** - A huge crowd has gathered around Jesus to hear him but Jesus has been speaking to his disciples. Someone from the crowd calls out to him. He wants Jesus to advocate for him with the family inheritance. He sees Jesus as someone that he can use to get what he wants, the family property. He doesn't really care about Jesus and what he has to say as long as it is in support of his cause. He cares about the money! Further he has interrupted Jesus as he is speaking in order to deal with a personal family matter. He is rude and doesn't see it.

Jesus responds by questioning why he is even asking him to intervene. Who appointed me a judge between you? Then he gives the man and everyone listening a warning. Watch out

for all kinds of greed and covetousness because a person's life doesn't consist in how much stuff they have! The Kingdom of God is not about stuff!

We in America today need to heed Jesus' warning. The ads continually try and undo what Jesus says here and make it all about the stuff we have and use. If we don't have a particular product then our lives are diminished and less than they should be. Jesus warns us clearly here, that is not true.

**12:16-19** - Jesus tells the man and the crowd the parable of the rich fool.

The ground of a certain rich man produced an abundant crop. The ground produces the crop not the rich man. In many ways he has nothing to do with his wealth. God has blessed him but he does not see it. He carries on a dialogue with himself. He does not ask God or his friends or family for counsel and advice. He seeks his own counsel. Greed makes us selfish and self-centered. He has no place to keep such a large crop and wonders what he should do. His solution is to tear down his old barns and build new ones that will hold all of his crops and goods. Then he can take life easy and party to his heart's content because he has enough for many years. The problem is he thinks he is guaranteed a future but he is not. See *James 4:13-15*. It is arrogant to assume our future is guaranteed the way we want it to be. We are not in control, God is.

**12:20-21** - He has left God out of his plans and now God lets him know he is not in charge of his future God is.

God calls him, you fool. I think Jesus uses the term the way the Psalmist does in *Psalms 14:1*, the fool says in his heart, there is no God. The rich man has not factored God into his plans for wealth and leisure. Jeremiah says in *17:11*: *Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means. When his life is half gone, they will desert him, and in the end he will prove to be a fool.* Jesus does not say the man gained his wealth by unjust means however. He says his ground produced a bumper crop.

The man is a fool because God now demands his life. His days are up and now who will get all that he has prepared for himself in his greed? Someone else will eat and drink and be merry off of his wealth and where will his soul, his life be? The implication is the rich man will not be in heaven with God for he is a fool and fools don't think there is a God.

Jesus' conclusion is that this is how it will be with greedy people who are not rich towards God, meaning who do not cultivate a rich relationship with God. They count on their wealth and their money but not God. Did the greedy man who wanted Jesus' help hear the parable and repent? One hopes so. Were there others in the crowd who heard and repented as well? They are the reason Jesus tells the parable. The story reinforces his warning about greed. Jesus' disciples must not be greedy because it poisons their relationship with God.

**12:22-31** - Jesus repeats a teaching he gave in the Sermon on the Mount to the disciples. Here it is in the context of the large crowd and after he has told the parable of the rich fool. Jesus is helping the disciples know what to do about their legitimate concerns about their lives and families for food, clothing and shelter. He first tells them not to worry about such things because life is about more than these. Most of the disciples were poor so what Jesus is telling them is difficult for them because for the poor life is a struggle to get enough to eat and shelter to stay in and protect your family. Jesus says life is more than bare survival.

He then uses the ravens or the birds of the air as an example. They don't plant crops or reap them yet God provides for them. He challenges them to have faith that they are more

valuable than the birds! Jesus then asks if by worrying they can add a single cubit to their height, which is a metaphor for asking if they can add an hour to their lifespan. Worry steals life from us it does not add life. If worrying cannot do such a simple thing, i.e. make us live longer, then why do we worry about all the rest, especially things we cannot control? The point is we don't control our lives. We live under the illusion that we do. God is in control! If he is we need to trust that we are more valuable to him than the birds he cares for!

Jesus then uses the flowers or lilies of the field as his next example. They don't work yet they are beautiful in their colors even more so than King Solomon. Again Jesus asks the question about how valuable they are to God; if God cares for the grass and flowers of the field, which today bloom and tomorrow you pick to throw into the oven for your cook-fires won't he clothe you, o little faiths? Wood was too valuable for the daily cook-fires in many parts of Galilee so people would gather the grass, dry it, bundle and use it to cook their meals. Jesus uses what Dale Bruner calls *Little Faiths*, a title he gives the disciples at times, especially in Matthew. It points to the disciples' lack of faith and trust in God. Jesus is trying to change their perspective in order to get them to live out of a faith perspective that centers on God and his Kingdom rather than their own power and abilities.

He finishes the teaching as he did in the Sermon on the Mount but in context it points back to the man who was greedy and the parable. Don't be concerned with earthly and worldly wealth like the rich fool. Don't let anxiety over things dominate your lives. The pagans run after these things and your Heavenly Father knows you need the basic necessities of life. But life is more than basic necessities. Life is about the Kingdom of God. Seek it. Run after it, set your heart upon it and all the rest will be given you. God will provide. You don't need to worry!

**12:32-34** - Jesus re-focuses their lives on the Kingdom. He calls them to not be afraid; the Father is pleased to give them the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is theirs through a relationship with Jesus the Messiah. Earthly treasures mean nothing compared to the Kingdom of God. Live a Kingdom life-style. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven that cannot be stolen or rot. Don't focus on accumulating things on earth because where your treasure is there your heart will be. What you treasure tells God and tells everyone where your heart is. And if your heart is with your things then it is not with God and if it is not with God then the Kingdom of God is not first and you do not belong to it. Jesus is not Lord, you are, or your things are, or the world is, but it is not Jesus!

Jesus is reassuring the disciples that they don't need to be afraid but he is also warning them that the world and material things will tempt them away from the Kingdom. Keep focused and diligent in their relationship with Jesus and their focus on the Kingdom of God.

**12:35-40** - Jesus introduces the theme of watchfulness concerning the coming of the Son of Man. In context with the disciples this must have confused them. But Jesus is simply outlining the already not yet eschatology of the New Testament and the Kingdom of God. It is present already in Jesus and the first fruits of the Kingdom life will be given after Jesus completes his mission when forgiveness is fulfilled and the Holy Spirit is given. But the consummation of the work of the Messiah-Son of Man awaits his second coming. When will that be? Jesus says be ready and watch because you will not know. He will come at an hour that you do not expect.

Jesus tells them a parable of the servants waiting for the master to return from a wedding banquet. The servants who are ready for their master's return will open the door when he knocks and let him in. They were watching and ready to serve him. The master will be so happy with them he will serve them! That was unheard of in Jesus' time! Yet it also expresses a principle of

Jesus' mission, he comes as a servant to give his life for us all. It will be good for the servants if they are watching and ready even in the second or third watch of the night, meaning the middle of the night when everyone else is asleep. The point is watch and be ready because he may return when no one suspects or is ready for him.

Jesus then shifts metaphors and adds a second short parable. He speaks now of the master of the house who was unprepared for the thief to break in. If he had known when the thief was coming he would not have allowed his house to be robbed. Is Jesus relating this to Satan and his house and realm? Otherwise he equates the Son of Man and his return to the thief breaking into the house. Certainly the cross and resurrection was a surprise to Satan and his demons. They recognized him as the Son of God and continually challenged and begged him not to judge them or send them to the Pit. Paul says in *1 Corinthians 2:8* that if the rulers of this age, which means both earthly and demonic powers, had known of God's plan they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. It is possible that Jesus in this parable is expressing the already not yet eschatology of his first and second comings. Satan then becomes the owner of the house just as he was in the parable of the strongman. We are the servants in the first parable ready and watching for our master's return. For both, Jesus returns at an hour we do not expect, but if we are ready we will welcome him, knowing he is coming.

Jesus consistently teaches he will return when we do not expect him. He talks about watching the signs and knowing he is near but even the prophecy teachers will be surprised when he comes. The Dispensationalists say this is because the rapture will happen at an unknown time but his Second Coming will be known because the prophetic countdown will start and they know how that goes. I still believe this is reading into the text from their system and making it say what they want it to say. There is no hint here of a rapture separate from Jesus' second coming. The distinctions Jesus makes are between his present coming and his return and how they fit into the eschatological plan of God.

**12:41-48** - Peter then asks Jesus to clarify to whom the parable is addressed. He notices Jesus' change in focus and the two parables, one about the servant and one about the owner and he is confused. He is trying to figure out if Jesus is speaking just to the disciples or is he speaking to the crowd gathered around them.

Jesus in reply gives another parable and returns to the focus on the servants of the master. Here he speaks of the steward of the house who is in charge of the servants to make sure they are taken care of. He is the overseer, Greek *oikonomos*. Jesus is telling the disciples that we are like stewards of the Kingdom. We are stewards of Jesus' mission and his people, especially if we are leaders! We do not own the house or the servants, God does! Our authority is delegated to us and not native to us. We don't earn it; it is given to us by Jesus the master of the house.

When the master returns and his steward has been faithful then the master will put him in charge of the entire household, including all the master owns. This is the picture of Jesus' reign and being co-heirs with him. All he has we will have! But, if the steward is unfaithful, if he takes advantage of the master's absence and takes advantage of his position and mistreats the master's servants then when the master comes at a day the steward does not expect him, the master will punish the steward and cast him out with the unbelievers. He will be judged because he was not faithful! Jesus implies that judgment will be hell and the unfaithful steward will be cast out with the unbelievers because he showed he does not know the master nor have a relationship with him by his actions. He does not love the master or his servants.

Jesus warns the disciples that if they know Jesus' will and are not ready for him and do not do what he asks then the Lord will punish them when he comes. If they do not know and do not do what he asks the punishment will be far less. For everyone who has been given much, much will be required of them. And the one to whom much has been entrusted, much more will be asked. Jesus is speaking of leadership here. It demands sacrifice and diligence. Our reward for success is more responsibility!

Jesus' parable answers Peter's question. He was speaking to the disciples because they are his apostles, his sent ones and to them are given the keys of the Kingdom. Specifically he is speaking to Peter as the leader of the apostles, and to James and John as well, the inner three. The twelve all knew about their relationships with Jesus and his relationship with the three. This parable outlines in another way what Jesus has already taught about servant leadership in his Kingdom. Leaders are servants and stewards of God's church. They are his people not our people. It is his church and not ours! Even to us Jesus will return at a time when we are not expecting him. Our job as leaders is to be ready for him and to give an accounting of our stewardship!

**12:49-53** - Jesus sounds like John the Baptist here in vv.49-50. John had said Jesus was going to bring the Holy Spirit and fire. Jesus is bringing the fire of God's presence in the Holy Spirit and the Kingdom of God but he must go through his own fire, the baptism of the fire of God's judgment on the cross. He is distressed until it is completed! Jesus was not looking forward to the suffering of the cross but to what would come after. He would be resurrected and return to heaven and send the Spirit on all his disciples. These verses reflect the language of *Hebrews 12* that Jesus endured the cross despising its shame for the joy that was set before him.

He is the Prince of Peace of *Isaiah 9* and *Zechariah 9* yet here Jesus says he comes not to bring peace on earth but division. The angels had sung peace on earth but that had related to God and human beings. Here Jesus says his mission will bring division between human beings. Families will be divided because of him, including fathers and sons and mothers and daughters. This is Simeon's prophecy coming true. Jesus is the dividing line of history. Our relationship with him determines everything not our relationships with our families. This means families will be divided in eternity, some who accept Christ and others who do not. Our eternal destiny is determined by what we do with Jesus Christ and not what family we belong to. Who we are into eternity is determined by our relationship with Jesus not by who our parents or brothers or sisters are. Jesus is the center. This would have been a radical idea for the disciples to try and understand because people and family were everything!

**12:54-56** - Jesus tells the crowd to look at the signs in order to understand what is happening. They know how to predict the weather yet they cannot interpret what is happening in front of them in Jesus. I think here Jesus is talking about his current mission and not the second coming. This saying is given to the crowd and not the disciples. He's trying to get them to understand he is the Messiah and salvation and the Kingdom are being offered to them through him. But they are resistive and dense. They don't see the miracles or his teaching or anything that Jesus is doing as fulfilling prophecy. They are so wrapped up in their kingly, military messianic expectations that they do not see that Jesus is fulfilling so many other messianic prophecies and all of the prophecies of God's Servant!

Compare what he says here to the crowd about interpreting the signs and what he says to the disciples about coming at an hour we least expect it.

**12:57-59** - At first glance this saying seems out of place. Yet Jesus is telling them understand the situation and make peace, be reconciled to God and to one another. Your adversary in this instance is Jesus, the Messiah, not Satan the accuser. The signs are all around that Jesus is who he says he is, God himself and the Messiah. Take note; figure it out! Judgment is coming because the judge is here, now! Make peace with him and with the Father because if you do not you may not have another chance!

In context the saying does make sense because Jesus is saying they are in a crisis. They are being judged even as they speak. The final verdict of God is going to be pronounced over the human race at the cross. Jesus is telling them the time is short; the time to decide is here. Choose life. Choose Jesus and his forgiveness!

### **Chapter 13:**

**13:1-5** - Some came to Jesus and told him about an incident in the temple where Pilate had some people killed and their blood mixed with the blood of their sacrifices. This would have been terribly offensive to the Jews even more so than the people had been executed by the Romans. The people are asking Jesus to comment. They come to him with the prevalent notion that great suffering or a terrible death was an indication of great sin. Any catastrophe indicated that the people had committed some great wickedness because the good prospered and the wicked suffered. Jesus refuses to go along with this view. He says suffering is not necessarily a punishment for sin. Sometimes bad things happen to people but all have sinned and need to repent. The manner of death for the Galileans that Pilate murdered or the ones on whom the tower at the Pool of Siloam fell were not punishment for their worse than normal sins.

Jesus asks the people if they think the Galileans killed in the temple were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they died a tragic death. Jesus says, they were not. Unless you repent you too will perish. He makes the same case for the people upon whom the tower fell in Jerusalem. They were not guiltier than anyone else in Jerusalem. But everyone needs to repent because we have all sinned. The word he uses for perish means to be lost eternally. In other words the manner of our deaths here is nothing compared to being lost eternally in our sins and forever separated from God. Repent!

**13:6-9** - Jesus tells the people around him a parable; the same ones who had come to him with the story about the Galileans in the temple. He is pushing them to see their need to repent and that the time for them is growing short. A man had a fig tree and wanted some fruit from it but found none. He said to his gardener cut it down, it's had three years to bear fruit and there is none. It is useless and taking up space. The gardener replies leave it alone for one more year. Let me cultivate it and weed around it and fertilize it and see if it bears fruit next year. He asks for one more year to see if it will bear fruit.

Fig trees take a long time to mature and bear fruit and three years is on the early side of expecting a crop. The people knew this but Jesus is referring to his ministry and its climax in Jerusalem to which he is headed. He has been with them three years and will only allow them one more year, which would have been after his resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit. I think Jesus is saying God is giving the Jews every chance to repent and turn to Jesus as the Messiah and he will give them a little more time but their time is running out. The time for repentance is now! The Messiah is here. If they refuse to repent and bear the fruit of repentance then God will reject them and turn to other trees. That is exactly what happened. God rejected

the Jews in 70 and turned to the Gentiles! Even as the Gentiles were being added to the church the Jews did not repent but turned away from Jesus as Messiah. Has God completely rejected his ancient people? Paul argues no in *Romans 9-11*. Today more and more Jews are coming to know Jesus as Messiah yet the majority is still hostile to him.

**13:10-17** - Jesus is teaching in one of the synagogues. This story gives us clues into how Luke ordered the Travel Narrative. There is no indication of Jesus being on a journey to Jerusalem at this point. This sounds like an incident during his Galilean ministry. Parts of the Travel Narrative indicate Jesus is moving towards the climax of his mission in Jerusalem. Parts of it sound like he is in Galilee ministering to people as he has always done. I think Luke mixes and matches his stories in a purposeful way using the framework of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem to organize his material. It is possible that all of these incidents occur while Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem but some, like this incident, seem as if Jesus is in an area for some time and not moving one day to the next on the way to Jerusalem. Luke has his reasons for shaping his material for Theophilus.

Here he is teaching on the Sabbath in a synagogue. A woman comes who had been crippled by a spirit, presumably a demon, for eighteen years. She could not straighten at all. This is one of the few times in the gospels that we see a demon causing an actual physical malady. The gospels do not say that all crippling diseases or conditions are demonically caused, but this one was. Jesus calls her forward to himself. She would have been at the back of the synagogue and even behind the screen if it was large and rich enough. He calls her into the men's area and says she is free from her infirmity. The Greek word can mean sickness or weakness of body, thus infirmity. Luke gives no indication that Jesus cast out a demon here. Perhaps we can assume that, but Jesus merely loosens her bonds, he sets her free, Greek *apolo*, to loose or set free. He lays hands on her and she straightens up praising God for her healing.

The synagogue ruler is indignant that Jesus has healed her. Yet he blames her and not Jesus. Come on one of the other days and not the Sabbath to be healed, implying she, or Jesus, has violated the Sabbath by healing her and releasing her from her bondage on the Sabbath day. Jesus' answer is a scathing critique of their twisted legalistic religion. He calls them hypocrites for giving their animals food and water on the Sabbath day yet denying freedom from long bondage and suffering for this daughter of Abraham, whom he says Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years. The prevailing notion among the Pharisees and legalists would have been the woman's sin had kept her bound and that God was punishing her. Jesus denies that and says it has been Satan who had oppressed her and that God was not punishing her for her sin. Her demonic bondage deserves to be set free on the Sabbath day, the day God set aside for the Jews to honor and worship him!

Jesus' opponents are humiliated because he has shown everyone there how petty and twisted their religious and legal rules are. The people in the synagogue are delighted by Jesus and the wonderful things he did for the woman. The common people are open to him and his teaching. They are open to the Kingdom of God among them. The ruler of the synagogue and his allies have been shamed publicly. That did not sit well with them.

**13:18-21** - Jesus tells two small parables about the Kingdom of God to the people at the synagogue. The first is the parable of the mustard seed. The mustard seed was the smallest seed the Jews knew and had become a proverbial saying, small as a mustard seed. It is around the size of a poppy seed. Jesus says a man took a mustard seed and planted it in his garden. There it grew

until it became so large it was like a tree and the birds of the air came and nested in its branches. Jesus is telling us that the Kingdom starts small. In fact its beginnings in people are so small they seem insignificant and tiny. Yet the Kingdom grows and transforms until it can't be denied. It becomes so large that it becomes shelter for others around it. The birds of the air could be a symbol for the Gentiles. The Kingdom of God will become so large the Gentiles will be able to come and be a part of it. This is what the prophets had said would happen. In fact the phrase about the birds of the air nesting in its branches is a quote from *Ezekiel 17:23*, a prophecy talking about God planting a small cedar tree that will grow so large the birds of the air will nest in it. The whole point about the tiny beginning and the inexorable growth of the Kingdom is that Jesus and his disciples seem like an insignificant beginning. Surely Jesus can't be God's Messiah! Where is his great army, these twelve ordinary men and the women who provide for them? They are like the mustard seed. Given time Jesus' followers will grow into an amazing people where many will come and shelter among them, including the Gentiles. The Book of Acts is Luke's version of the parable of the mustard seed. I don't think after Theophilus read it the point was lost on him!

The parable of the yeast in the huge amount of dough has the same point. The large amount of dough is truly large, almost 22 liters or 9 gallons worth of dough. That would have been unusual to bake that much bread at one time. How could a little bit of yeast leaven that much dough? Yet it does. The whole loaf rises. You can't see the yeast at work in the beginning but you begin to see its effects. The Kingdom of God is like the yeast in the dough. Don't miss the fact as well that Jesus uses a woman as the one who plants the yeast in the dough. Over and over Jesus affirms women and their role in the Kingdom and its growth.

Jesus shifts his metaphor of the yeast to something positive here. In *12:1* he told the disciples to be on their guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, meaning their legalistic hypocrisy. Here he uses yeast in a positive sense describing the work of God's Kingdom and how it grows mysteriously from a small insignificant beginning to something so large it can no longer be ignored. In fact it is miraculous! Once the Kingdom is set in motion nothing can stop it. It will triumph in the end.

**13:22-27** - Luke reminds us that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, teaching as he goes. On the way someone asks him if only a few will be saved. Jesus tells a parable in reply about the narrow door.

He says make every effort, strive, and fight to overcome obstacles, to enter through the narrow door. Jesus is not talking about earning our way by good works because in the next few sentences the owner of the house will reply to people trying to enter I never knew you. The owner's reply is all about relationships not effort and worthiness. Jesus is saying strive, fight to overcome whatever obstacles are in your path to have a relationship with me. Jesus is the narrow door. This is a very exclusive parable. There are not many doors into the Kingdom of God; there is one narrow door, a relationship with Jesus Christ the Messiah.

Many will try and enter but will not be able to. Why? There will come a time when the owner of the house will close the door and no one else will be able to get in. There is a time limit on when we can enter the Kingdom. As Paul will later say, now is the day of salvation. Many outside will plead for the owner to open the door and let them in. The owner will answer I don't know you or where you come from. The ones outside will claim we spent time with you, ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets. The owner will reply with the same refrain, I don't know you or where you come from. Get away from me all you evildoers.

Jesus is saying just because you are a Jew doesn't mean salvation is automatic. Just because Jesus came to the Jews and ate and drank with them and taught among them doesn't mean they will be saved. He ate and drank often with the Pharisees but they did not receive him or want to follow him. In the end they will be on the outside looking in begging for the master to open the door and let them in. It will be too late. Our individual religious acts and good works will mean nothing because the door will only open to those who know Jesus and have a relationship with him as Lord and master. Jesus is telling them there is a time to enter the Kingdom and that time is now. The offer will close and if people are not following him as Messiah and Lord they will be excluded. The only way in through the door is if you have an invitation from the owner inside. Jesus is the owner of the Kingdom, of salvation. The key is does the owner know me and do I know the owner?

Jesus does not directly answer the question will only a few be saved. He doesn't say yes or no, he says the door into salvation is narrow and many will try and enter but not be able to. He does not say many others will try and enter and will be able to because they know the master of the house.

**13:28-30** - Jesus is pointing this parable at the Jews who reject him and showing them as he hinted in the mustard seed, that many, even the Gentiles will come and be part of the Kingdom and eat at the Messianic Feast but they will be excluded. They rejected their own Messiah. All that remains is to be outside looking in. Outside here is a metaphor for hell, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, or grinding of teeth. It will be a place of jealousy when they see others coming from east and west, north and south, all points of the compass to eat at the Messiah's table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jesus is not talking about the Diaspora he is talking about the Gentiles! Some of the Jews who thought they deserved to be at the Messiah's table, namely the Pharisees and the religious, will be excluded. Some they would have never believed would be invited, namely the Gentiles will take their places because they knew the Messiah while the religious leaders rejected him. Human religious achievements mean nothing to Jesus. A relationship with him is everything! Thus some who are first, meaning the Pharisees who thought they deserved to be in the Kingdom, will be outside looking in. They will be excluded and last. And some who are the last, the Gentiles whom the Pharisees thought could not enter God's Kingdom precisely because they were pagans and Gentiles, will be first. They will share Messiah's banquet. How comforting Jesus' words here must have been to Theophilus and his fellow Gentile believers! What must some of the Pharisees who had been with Jesus and openly opposed him have thought if they lived to see Jerusalem destroyed in 70 by the Romans? Did they even think of his words here? Did they fully understand and repent? The evidence of history is they hardened their hearts toward Jesus and his followers even more!

**13:31-33** - Dr. Ken Bailey has this section as the center of the Travel Narrative. Some Pharisees come to Jesus and warn him that Herod Antipas is trying to find him and kill him just as he did John the Baptist. This is a curious passage and gives credence to the idea that though Jesus opposed the Pharisees and often criticized them vehemently and they him, there were those among them who cared about Jesus and perhaps followed him or were attracted to him. We know at least two of the Sanhedrin Pharisees, Joseph and Nicodemus, followed him. It is not difficult to imagine that there were those in Galilee who did too. Even despite their corporate opposition Jesus continued to eat with them and fellowship with them. Here they warn him about Herod. It is easy to believe their warning. Herod was probably increasingly threatened and

confused by Jesus and his mission. He kept talking about the Kingdom of God and attracting huge crowds wherever he went. Clearly he was more popular than Herod. The Pharisees' warning also shows Jesus was still in Galilee at this moment.

These Pharisees come to Jesus and warn him to get out of Herod's territory. Capernaum was Jesus' ministry headquarters near the northeastern border of Herod Antipas' territory. It would have been easy to slip over the border into Herod Philipp's jurisdiction. Jesus tells them he is going to Jerusalem. He calls Herod that fox. Jesus cryptically refers to his resurrection here for those who knew the story. Today and tomorrow he continues his mission of demonstrating the Kingdom by healing and casting out demons. On the third day he will reach his goal and finish his mission. He could be talking about the cross but the resurrection makes more sense because he has already taught his disciples about being raised on the third day. Had these Pharisees heard that teaching? I don't think so. I think he says the third day for the benefit of the disciples.

He then cryptically refers to his death in Jerusalem in the next sentence. Today and tomorrow he must head toward Jerusalem and the next day. He says next day here and not third day, even though mathematically it is the third day. Then he adds surely no prophet can die outside of Jerusalem. He is speaking of his cross and his death for human sin. He describes himself as a prophet, which he was, the prophet like Moses, but he was even greater than Moses and all the prophets. He was and is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!

**13:34-35** - Jesus now speaks not as a prophet but as Messiah. He speaks as God lamenting over his peoples' stubborn refusal to accept him and follow him. Jerusalem is symbolic for the whole Jewish people. Luke places this saying here. Matthew places it at the end of the seven woes to the Pharisees in the temple during Holy Week. Both are uttered in the presence of the Pharisees. It is quite possible that Jesus repeats himself; once in Galilee and once in Jerusalem.

Here is God's Son lamenting over his city. Yearning for his people to come to him and allow him to gather them to himself but they would not. They refuse. Jesus echoes Hosea's words about how much he loves his people. He is like a mother hen who gathers her chicks under her wings. His yearning is tender here and motherly. The reality is as Jesus knows, they would not let him. He knows that he is going to his death and that Jerusalem will turn against him.

Then he utters a most chilling prophecy. Your house is abandoned. By rejecting the Messiah the door will close on those who reject him. They will be cast out. All of this is fulfilled in 70 when the Romans destroy Jerusalem. What must Theophilus and others who had read the gospels thought when the Jewish revolt broke out and Rome destroyed Judea and Jerusalem? Did they understand those events as fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies about Jerusalem?

Jesus declares in an already-not yet way that the Jews will not recognize him until they declare the words of *Psalms 118*, the great Passover Hallel Psalm. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The crowd would declare that on Palm Sunday when Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem. Then they would turn on him by Friday and shout to crucify him, rejecting Jesus as their Messiah and king. One day, some day, they will say it again and will weep over the one they killed and pierced. Jesus' prophecy is chilling for the Jews but it opens the door for the time of the Gentiles and their entrance into the Kingdom of God!

## **Chapter 14:**

**14:1-6** - On a Sabbath Jesus is once again eating at a Pharisee's house. This appears to be a fairly regular occurrence in Jesus' ministry and shows he was still willing to fellowship with them

despite their hostility to him and his criticism of them. That is a lesson that we need to learn as well!

The Pharisees were watching him closely to find something they could criticize and they placed before him a man who had dropsy, swelling in his arms and legs like cancer patients who have had lymph nodes removed. Jesus asks them if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath and they are silent. He then heals the man. Jesus then asks them if they would rescue one of their animals if it fell into a well on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees have nothing to say. Jesus points out their hypocrisy and the bankruptcy of their Sabbath rules. They didn't want to hear this but Jesus is trying to help them see how far their laws have separated them from the heart of God and how much they need repentance and salvation. The whole chapter moves with increasing drama towards the parable of the great banquet. Chapter 15 will climax in the parable of the two lost sons and the opposition of the Pharisees will only increase. Unfortunately for them Jesus could not convince them.

**14:7-11** - Jesus teaches them about humility. The Pharisees were all concerned with face and honor and who got what. Jesus says in the Kingdom the surest path to honor is humility. He shows us God is the humble God. We need to be like him. The Pharisees' rules did not result in the humble character of God. They resulted in religious and spiritual pride which separated them from God!

Jesus' instructions to them are don't exalt yourselves. Let someone else show you honor lest you be embarrassed and lose face! Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. This plays out in Jesus' life. He humbled himself even to death on a cross so God raised him from the dead and gave Jesus the name above every name! The truest mark of humility is to think of others before one thinks of oneself just as Jesus did.

**14:12-14** - Jesus continues to teach them about humility, speaking to them about whom to invite when they have a dinner party. Don't invite people who will pay you back. Invite people like the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, people who are never invited to banquets. They cannot pay you back. Let your reward be from God not people. Do like God does. Which of us can ever pay God back for his forgiveness or eternal life? The Pharisees' spiritual pride told them they had earned God's favor and the Kingdom. Jesus is telling them no one can earn it. It is a gift!

He will return to the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame in the parable of the great banquet. These were people the Pharisees considered unclean and unworthy to attend a banquet. The popular notion was they were this way because of some sin and God was punishing them. In many ways their view is not unlike the Buddhist-Hindu idea of karma. They deserve their suffering for something they did and consequently they are out of favor with God. Jesus will show them how far out of synch with God's heart they are. In fact it is the Pharisees who deserve judgment for their spiritual pride!

**14:15** - Jesus has just finished talking about inviting those who cannot repay you and how at the resurrection you will be rewarded, when one of the Pharisees sitting at the table says blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the Kingdom. In response Jesus tells the parable of the great banquet. The Pharisee thinks he will be at the feast because he is worthy! He believes he has made it and misses Jesus' point all together. That is why he tells the parable to get them to see that their works righteousness really separates them from God rather than draws God to them.

**14:16-17** - A rich man prepared a feast for his friends and sent out the first invitation to his guests. They accept the invitation. As the host he procures all the food and slaughters the meat to accommodate his guests. The guests are given a great honor by the invitation and the host is honored to have them accept. The guests know the day and the time of the feast and have accepted the host's hospitality. The day of the banquet arrives and the host sends his servant to tell his guests that everything is now prepared. This would be the second invitation to the feast and was customary. The guests would know the day but not the time and to save everyone embarrassment and waiting around the host sends the servant to let his guests know everything is now ready. The host is filled with anticipation for his guests to arrive and the guests would likewise be filled with the same excitement. The Pharisees who are listening to Jesus' story have probably been through something similar and maybe even been the host at a dinner party. This is familiar ground.

**14:18-20** - Something unexpected and unthinkable happens. The guests all make excuses to their host as to why they cannot come! Unless one was ill this would never happen!!!

The first says he has just bought a field and needs to go inspect it. A farmer in that culture knows every rock in a field he is going to buy! No one buys a field sight unseen! The next guest says he has bought five pairs of oxen and now must try them out. That is like buying a used car without ever test driving it. You wouldn't do such a thing. Oxen that are not paired correctly can hurt each other. They must work as a team otherwise the stronger can literally work the weaker to death. They must be compatible with each other. To buy one pair without knowing this would be stupid but this guest has bought five! At this point the Pharisees are wondering what kind of guests the host has invited and they would be incensed that they have treated the host this way. The third guest doesn't even say please excuse me. He simply tells the host that he has just gotten married and can't come. Even though the first two guests' excuses are ridiculous they are at least plausible. The last one doesn't even work because the guest would have known when the wedding was and should never have accepted the host's hospitality in the first place! He lied that he could come because he knew he wouldn't be able to attend because he would be with his new bride! This was the height of rudeness towards the host!

Jesus is trying to tell the Pharisees that their excuses as to why they cannot follow Jesus as their Messiah are like the excuses of the rude guests to the host. They are foolish and ridiculous and offensive! They have insulted Jesus and insulted God! They think they deserve to be at the Messiah's table but don't know that they are insulting him by refusing to follow him

**14:21** - The servant returns and reports back to his master what his guests have said. The master is furious! He orders his servants to go out into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame! These are the same people Jesus told the Pharisees to invite to their banquets in *4:13*. Jesus contrasts who the master of the house invites with the guests and their foolish excuses. The poor can't afford to buy a field. The crippled can't work a team of oxen. The blind don't get married and the lame don't get invited to banquets! The master is inviting people who wouldn't make anyone's list. They all know that the banquet is being held because the whole town will know. In fact some of them may come to the door of the estate hoping to beg and maybe receive a little crumb from the master's table. Suddenly they find themselves sitting at the master's table with a feast spread before them. They had never imagined that something like this would happen to them. They are overjoyed and overwhelmed. It's too good to be true!

Jesus is telling the Pharisees who will actually enter the Kingdom of God: those who receive the gracious invitation of God who don't deserve to be there. In fact no one deserves to sit at the Messiah's table. It is an invitation of grace whereas the Pharisees have believed it is an invitation of worthiness. They are not worthy. In truth they are foolish because in their self-righteousness they do not see their need for forgiveness. When the Messiah has come and the second invitation to the banquet has gone out and Jesus has called people to follow him they make excuses and still believe they are invited because they deserve to be there. They are blind and foolish and have made God angry for rejecting his Son!

**14:22-24** - The servant comes back and says the master's instructions have been carried out and there is still room at the table. The master then says go outside the town, out to the highways and along the hedges and compel travelers there to come in because my house will be full. Jesus now opens the doorway to the Gentiles because the chances are there would be more than faithful Jews on the roadways around the town. He also uses an interesting word, compel. This is more than an invitation; this is grabbing someone and bringing them in. The travelers out on the roadway don't even know the master and don't know there is a banquet. The poor of the town did, they just didn't think they would ever be invited! The Gentiles out on the highway are surprised and confused by the invitation and must be stunned when they recline at table to eat the feast. How did they get here? What is this all about? This feast is amazing! Who is the master and why is he inviting me?

Jesus is telling the Pharisees that Israel and her spiritual leaders are the guests invited at the first. They have rejected the Messiah because his invitation has gone out! They are making excuses as to why they can't come to Messiah's feast. The poor who don't think they will be invited at all because they have been told they are not worthy are invited instead of the religious. Even more, those who don't even know there is a banquet are invited, including any Gentiles that accept the master's invitation! What about those who were first invited and now make ridiculous and insulting excuses for why they cannot come? They are excluded! They will never taste of Messiah's table! The Pharisees who thought they deserved to be at the table will be on the outside, excluded and lost! It is a stunning and bold parable that Jesus tells to try and shake the Pharisees into confronting their self-righteousness and need for God's grace and forgiveness. Chapter 15 will be the climax of Jesus' efforts.

**14:25** - Luke now shifts the scene away from the Pharisee's dinner party to the crowds that were following Jesus as he traveled along towards Jerusalem. Jesus is going to address counting the cost of following him. These are people who have been attracted to Jesus because of his miracles, his teaching and forgiveness and the Kingdom of God. Jesus is going to push them to make a decision about him. We are saved by grace and invited into the Kingdom through the mercy and forgiveness of Jesus yet that grace is not cheap. Jesus will explain why.

**14:26-27** - Jesus uses the language of hyperbole to make his point. No one, including one's family can be placed before Jesus as Lord and Messiah. One's wife, husband, father, mother, children, siblings and even one's own life cannot be higher than Jesus. This must have been difficult for the people to hear. It is hard enough in our day but in Jesus' day family, and especially the authority of one's father was paramount. One's family gave one an identity. Jesus is saying his new family; the family of the people of God in the Kingdom of God will be higher than one's earthly family. Jesus' disciples will take their identity from him and from their

relationship with their new brothers and sisters. Jesus will be first of all or he will not be first at all!

Jesus uses the word "hate" here in a figurative way. It is clear from other passages that Jesus does not hate his mother or siblings. He loves them. He uses hate here to describe not putting anyone in a higher position than Jesus in one's life. We are not to value anyone else above Jesus. One could see it as no other gods before Jesus. In this case it is no other relationship before Jesus.

He intensifies the cost of following him by saying we must die to ourselves, carry our cross and follow Jesus. A convicted criminal carried their cross to the place of crucifixion, just as Jesus did to Golgotha. In order to follow Jesus he says we will have to carry our cross and die to ourselves, to our agendas, dreams, wishes, desires and goals. They must all be submitted to Jesus or one cannot follow him and be his disciple. Jesus is defining the fundamental relationship with him if someone is to be his disciple. Jesus is Lord!

**14:28-33** - Jesus then gives two parables about counting the cost before deciding to follow him. In the first he describes a landowner who wants to build a tower, probably to guard a vineyard. Jesus says he will first try and estimate the cost and whether he can afford to build otherwise he will start but cannot finish. Then everyone who sees it will ridicule the builder because he started something he couldn't finish. He will lose face and be publicly shamed for his failure to count the cost!

In the second parable Jesus uses the example of the king who is about to go to war with another king. The king must first determine if he has enough troops to win against his enemy otherwise he must sue for peace because he cannot win. Jesus then adds in v.22, in the same way whoever does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. The king gave up his desire to go to war with his enemy because the enemy was greater. Jesus is pressing the crowds to give up all to follow him. He is saying you can't just proclaim me as Messiah and not follow me. Salvation comes through a relationship with Jesus as Lord and me as his disciple. Jesus doesn't even have another category of people in relationship with him. You are either his disciple or you are not. If you are, he is first above every thing and every one else, including yourself!

The whole series of sayings is designed to get the crowds to confront what they are going to do with Jesus. Are they going to follow him as his disciples or are they along for the ride and the show?

**14:34-35** - This is a difficult saying at any time, but in this context it is doubly difficult. What is Jesus trying to say? Jesus has said in other places that his disciples are the salt of the earth. In the context here of counting the cost and starting but not finishing I think Jesus is saying that a disciple that starts strong but then loses his effectiveness is fit for nothing and needs to be thrown out. I don't think Jesus is talking about losing one's salvation here but about discipleship. He even raises the question how can it be made salty again. To what is he referring? Is he saying that repentance is impossible for a disciple who has turned away from following Jesus and is no longer effective? I don't think he would say that based on other passages. What does he mean? Once again I think Jesus is using hyperbole to press the crowd into making a decision once for all concerning him. Are they in or out, with him or against him? Do they want to follow him and if they do are they in it for the long haul or will they fall away when difficulties arise? Given the fact that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and the cross this was a very important question for would-be disciples to answer. For us today it is also important especially as we see the culture

going further and further away from the Scriptures and opposition to following Jesus getting more blatant and vocal.

## Chapter 15:

**15:1-3** - Tax collectors and sinners were people the Pharisees said could not enter the Kingdom of God because they could not meet their requirements for repentance. They were permanently unclean in the Pharisees eyes therefore Jesus should not have been fellowshiping with them and eating with them. Jesus showed them hospitality and acceptance as sinners, people who were excluded from the Kingdom in the Pharisees' opinion. They were lost and without hope. Jesus tells the three parables of Luke 15, the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the two lost sons in response to their grumbling. He wants to show them that God seeks the lost and they can still repent and be a part of the Kingdom of God. He wants to show them that the Pharisees are wrong and that their rules and legalistic religion have put them far from God. He will press them to understand that they are lost themselves and in need of repentance just as much as the tax collectors and sinners.

Jesus never denies that the tax collectors and sinners are lost. He never denies that they need repentance. He is simply trying to show the Pharisees in their religious pride that they need repentance just as much and are just as much at risk before God as the tax collectors and sinners.

Who are the sinners? We know from *Luke 7* that the woman whom the Pharisees' labeled a prostitute was a sinner. It was a broad category and covered many offenses. It was anyone whose lifestyle kept them outside the Law of Moses and being able to repent and follow the Law. It was all of those people who were part of the despised trade list of the Pharisees.

The three parables intensify toward a dramatic climax. The lost in the first is one in a hundred. In the second it is one in ten. And in the third at first glance it is one in two, but in reality it is two because both sons are lost just in different ways.

**15:4-6** - There is so much going on here right from the start! Jesus first asks the Pharisees, suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. That is insulting on two fronts. First, shepherds were on the list of despised trades for the Pharisees, people who could not repent in the prescribed way and therefore were excluded from the Kingdom of God. Jesus paints the Pharisees as shepherds which would have rankled them from the first. Second, in the Middle East it is all about shame and honor. You save face at all costs. You don't take responsibility you deflect it. No one ever loses a sheep it wanders off. Jesus tells them they lost a sheep and are responsible for it! It was insulting!!!

Further this shepherd is different. He leaves the 99 in the wilderness and goes off in search of the lost sheep. The lost sheep matters to this shepherd; in fact it matters more than the 99! The sinners and the people of the land, the uneducated in the Law, which were the vast majority of the people of Judea and Galilee, they do not matter to the Pharisees. As far as they are concerned they are lost and there is no need to try and find them or rescue them. Jesus completely shatters that attitude! Lost people matter to God, even lost sinners! The shepherd goes into an all-out search for that lost sheep just as God has come to earth in the person of his Son to seek and to save the lost!

The shepherd finally finds the sheep. When he finds it he rescues it; puts it on his shoulders and carries it home. The lost sheep belongs at home with the rest. It is not excluded it is included. The job of the shepherd is to rescue the lost sheep not write it off. The Pharisees and the experts in the Law, the religious leaders, were the shepherds of Israel. They are like the

unfaithful shepherds in *Ezekiel 34* who don't take care of the flock. God chastises them for not caring for the injured, bringing back the strays and searching for the lost. Jesus is saying the same thing here. He is indicting those who should know better. God cares for all his people, even the sinners. The Pharisees should too rather than grumbling against Jesus for doing what they were not willing to do!

**15:6-7** - When the shepherd gets home with his lost sheep he wants to celebrate! He calls his friends and neighbors and asks them to rejoice with him because he found his lost sheep. The overwhelming emotion of the shepherd is joy at finding that which was lost. Jesus tells us God feels joy when one sinner comes home, when he or she is found. The Pharisees were grumbling that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus is celebrating because the lost are found! Who is closer to the heart of God? Jesus is already hinting that the Pharisees are not as close to God as they think they are.

Then he tells them a difficult saying full of double meaning. There is more rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents than over 99 righteous who don't need repentance. The sacrifices in the Law were designed to help Israel remember that they were sinners in need of repentance. No one was 100% righteous. No one did not need to repent from sin. All had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is little joy in heaven over the 99 who don't need repentance because they don't exist! The Pharisees thought they were included in those who would feast at Messiah's table because they had scrupulously kept the Law of Moses down to the finest detail. Jesus is telling them they are mistaken. In fact their spiritual pride has separated them from God and they are the ones who are lost in need of repentance. They do not see it. In the next two parables Jesus will intensify his case!

**15:8-10** - Jesus now intensifies his case. The shepherd had lost one sheep among a hundred. The woman will lose one coin among ten.

Jesus had compared the Pharisees to a despised shepherd. Now he compares them to a woman! Women in the Pharisees' world could not be taught the Law of Moses. In the stricter areas like Jerusalem they could not go out in public without a male to accompany them. One did not talk to a woman in public. In many cases it was very much like Saudi Arabia and other strict Muslim countries today. Jesus is putting the woman in the central place in the story, something the Pharisees would not have done and to which they would have objected.

The woman loses one of her ten silver coins. This was probably her necklace of coins which represented her dowry and her personal wealth that she could use if her husband divorced her or something happened to him. She has the coins securely fastened in a necklace so she won't lose them, but she does lose one. She is responsible. However, in this parable it is an inanimate coin which doesn't have a mind of its own, whereas in the lost sheep, sheep can wander off by themselves. In this parable the woman bears the responsibility for losing her coin. When she realizes she has lost it she goes on an all-out search. Her house would have been dark even in the daytime because of the small high windows in most Jewish houses. So she lights the lamp in the day to search for her coin. She sweeps the dirt floor of her home to find the coin. The home would have had only one or at most a few rooms in it so the places to look are limited. She doesn't have to search outside her home because chances are she has not left it. Village women spent most of their time in their homes or close by them. She searches diligently until she finds the coin because it is of great worth to her. She doesn't stop until she finds it!

When she finally finds her coin she calls her neighbors and friends together and asks them to come and celebrate with her. Village life is incredibly dull so any excuse for a party is taken. She is genuinely elated that she found her coin and now she wants to share her joy with her friends. Here Jesus uses the woman in the place of God as the one rejoicing over that which was lost.

Jesus then adds that there is great joy among the angels in heaven over one sinner who repents. The implication is the angels are joyful because God is joyful. It could also be the angels are still overwhelmed by the mercy and grace of God to rebellious sinners. It is the mystery of God's love and the gospel that fascinates them. Notice Jesus does not mention anyone who doesn't need to repent. In the first parable he mentions the 99 righteous and implies they don't exist. Here there is only the lost coin. The other nine are safe and sound but aren't righteous because they are inanimate objects. In the last parable both sons need to repent but only one does!

The shepherd and the woman are responsible for losing the sheep and the coin. They accept responsibility and seek that which was lost. They value the lost sheep and coin. The Pharisees did not value the sinners nor did they seek them or accept responsibility for them. Jesus did!

**15:11-12** - Jesus continues with yet a third parable only this time it is not one in 100, or even one in 10, but two sons who are lost in different ways. The first parable had been about a shepherd, the second about a woman, this third parable will be about a father who loves his sons. Jesus will weave a story of such dramatic impact that the Pharisees will not be able to miss what he is telling them. He will press them to repent of their pride and arrogance and come and fellowship with him and with the sinners and tax collectors who were lost but now are found. It is the greatest parable he told and it may be the greatest story ever told!

A man has two sons. The younger one came to his father and asked for his share of the estate. This would never happen! Essentially the younger son is telling his father I wish you were dead so give me my money now. He is rebellious, selfish and does not care about his father or his family. He has broken his father's heart!

In Jesus' day in his culture the father would have beaten the son or disowned him for such an insult. The father's honor and the family's honor demand it. The father and the whole family will lose great face in the village because of what the younger son has demanded from his father. But this father does not beat his son. In fact he does the unthinkable; he grants his son's request. He splits the estate and gives the younger son the share of the property that would have come to him upon his death. The other part, which by the Law is the larger part he gives to his oldest son. Because the father is still living the oldest son's money is not yet converted into cash. The father still has disposition but the older son now has ownership. Why does the father do this? Jesus' implication is he wants sons who obey him out of love and not out of duty. He loves his boys and wants them to love him in return. If he beats the younger son which his culture demanded, he will have an obedient son but not a loving son. His younger son will obey him out of fear and duty not out of love. He does the only thing he can that holds out the possibility that someday, somehow he can gain his younger son back. He divides the estate, granting his request and he lets him go.

At this point everyone listening, especially the Pharisees, would know that it is the oldest son's responsibility to reconcile his brother and his father. He must make every effort to make peace between them and save the family. That is his role as the eldest son. He does not. He lets

his brother go and does nothing to help his father. Jesus hints that the older brother hates his younger brother and wants him out of his life and out of the family. The more sinister hint is that he really does not love his father either because he does nothing to help soothe his father's broken heart. Jesus does not say this, but by leaving out the older brother's lack of response he implies that both sons are lost to their father. Both have a broken relationship with their father and with each other. Already the tension in the story is building!

**15:13-16** - Soon after the break with his father and after the father has converted the property to money the younger son takes his share and leaves, going to a distant country. It is probably a Gentile country because he ends up feeding pigs. He goes to a place where he is not known where he does not have the honor or name of his family to uphold. Now he can be the center of attention, not his father and not his hated older brother. Jesus says he wastes his money on loose living. The NLT says wild living and the NIV says the same. The word in Greek is *asotos*, with an alpha privative in front of *sotos*, a related word to *sotar*, or savior. Paul uses it as debauchery in *Ephesians 5:18*. It can mean living life without care or thought of the consequences. Living like one has no care in the world or gives a thought to what may come tomorrow. It is someone who is living so much in the moment spending money on his own pleasures and desires that they don't think about the consequences. That describes the younger son perfectly. He was selfish and wanted what he wanted when he wanted it! So he spends his money carelessly and freely being the life of the party for everyone! Now he has friends and people think he is great! But it's all a sham and a false front because eventually the money runs out and all his so-called friends don't lift a hand to help him when he is in need.

A famine comes and he is starving. He finally is desperate enough to lower his pride to hire himself out to a Gentile farmer to feed his pigs. He is so hungry he would even eat the pig food but no one will give him anything and he has enough pride left not to steal it. He has become a model sinner; the worst of the worst for the Pharisees. He is an unclean sinner who has rebelled against his father who is feeding pigs working for a Gentile. He has sunk as low as he can go. What will he do?

**15:17-20** - He comes to his senses. The Pharisees listening must have thought it's about time! What did the sinners and tax collectors think at this point? Did they see themselves in the younger son? He realizes even the lowest people in his father's house, the hired servants, have food to eat and here he is starving to death. A plan begins to take shape in his head. He still does not see he has broken his father's heart but he is at least willing to repent and come home.

He is the model sinner, a Jewish boy gone bad. Now he becomes the model repentant sinner in the Pharisees' eyes because his plan for repentance mirrors their own standards. The Pharisees said a person must demonstrate their sincerity in order to repent. They must do something to show they are serious about repenting. The younger son will go to his father. That means he will accept his father's beating which is totally expected by everyone listening to Jesus. Honor demands the father beat his son, to save his own face and the family's face that has been dragged through the mud by the younger son. Along the way as he comes into the town as the beggar he now is, he will have to run the gauntlet of all the boys of the town who will spit on him and throw rocks at him and insult him before he gets to the father. He will also have to endure the derision of the villagers who will insult him and shame him. By the time he gets to his father's house he will have been publicly shamed and will have demonstrated his desire to repent. Jesus shows he understands the Pharisees' theology very well. He is setting them up!

The second step in the Pharisees' repentance involves confessing one's sin. The younger son will do that too. He will say he has sinned and is no longer worthy to be called a son. The third step involves restitution. This is where the despised trades fell short; the Pharisees believed they were incapable of making restitution. The younger son has a plan. Make me one of your hired servants. He will nobly offer to work for his father and pay all the money back even if it takes him the rest of his life! How wonderful! How noble! Jesus finally understands how these sinners need to repent! There is only one problem with the son's plan. He has forgotten his father and the fact that he has broken his father's heart. The father doesn't want a hired servant; he wants a son! The first part of the parable has reached its turning point! Jesus has the Pharisees right where he wants them!

**15:20-21** - The son starts out for his father's house. Jesus now shifts the attention from the son to the father. While the young man is still a long way off, his father saw him. Why; he was looking for him, waiting for him to come home. The father stands in the place of God in Jesus' parable. And Jesus helps us understand the love of God for sinners. He is like the lovesick father longing for his rebellious boy to come home. He is looking for him to return, hoping for it. In contrast the Pharisees didn't even care about the tax collectors and sinners except as people they could criticize and judge. They had already eliminated them from repentance and salvation so why care about them. God cares and cares deeply. Jesus is about to show the Pharisees that as righteous as they think they are and as close to God as they think they are they do not understand the Father's heart at all!

When the father sees his son he is moved with compassion for him. The Greek word is *splagchna*, a moving in the gut. The first thing his father feels for his son is not anger or judgment but compassion. God has compassion on lost sinners and his compassion moves him to act. God acts in ways we do not anticipate nor can we even fathom because God acts on behalf of the rebellious sinner even when they don't deserve it and can never earn it.

His compassion stirs him to do something he has never done. He runs. A man his age never runs anywhere. He always acts with dignity and gravity. To run means he would have to lift up his robes and show off his inner tunic and his legs, meaning his underwear. It would be shameful and shocking to anyone who sees it. In fact that is exactly the father's plan. All the shame and derision, all the taunting and mocking that the son will have to endure on his way through the village until he gets to the father's house and the inevitable beating, now is directed towards the father. He takes it all upon himself. This is the cross in the midst of the parable of the Prodigal Son. God takes all the shame and punishment we deserve upon himself in the person of Jesus upon the cross. It is unexpected, unanticipated and shocking all at once. It is overwhelming and we are left without words in the face of it. How do we respond to such love?

All our efforts to earn God's love turn to ashes in the face of his love now understood for the first time. That describes the younger son. Jesus crafts the story in such a way that we understand that the son finally gets it. He has broken his father's heart yet his father still loves him more than he can understand. The son finally sees there is no use trying to earn his father's forgiveness or earn back the money. His father loves him. He runs to his son, throws his arms around him and kisses him, welcoming him home and showing his love for his boy. All his plans go by the wayside and all he can get out is his confession, which is exactly what he needs to say. Yet it is completely changed; father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Everything he says is true but he stops right there. He does not add make me as one of your hired servants. No more plan to win back the money and make

restitution. Until that moment he was the model repentant sinner in the Pharisees' eyes. Now he is the model repentant sinner in Jesus' eyes. Jesus shows the Pharisees how ridiculous their model of repentance is in the face of the forgiving love and compassion of God. How can you win back that which you can never earn? How can you deserve what you can never deserve? Some later manuscripts add the final line of the parable not understanding what Jesus is trying to teach us. They were well-meaning but miss the entire point! God forgives us!

**15:22-24** - Forgiveness for Jesus is more than just the expression of compassion and love. It is complete restoration! The father turns to the servants, who have probably breathlessly finally caught up to the old man, and says bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. The father is restoring his son to his former position. He is dressed in rags, now he will wear the best robe. This is all done not only before the servants which restores the son in the household, it is done before the whole village which restores the son's status with all the town. Beggars don't wear fine robes, sons do. The ring on his finger is a symbol of his status as son and heir before the whole village. Sandals are a symbol that he is a son and not a servant. Servants went barefoot, sons wear sandals. He will not be a servant, or a hired laborer, he will be a son again before everyone. This is the father's desire. It is God's desire too that the repentant sinner be restored to the status of son and daughter of God. The tax collectors and sinners with whom Jesus fellowshiped are being brought back into the family of Israel by Jesus. They too are sons and daughters of Abraham. We do not deserve it but God gives it to us because we have repented but more importantly because he has taken all our punishment upon himself and he loves us!

Now the father wants to share his joy over his son with everyone! He tells the servant to bring the fattened calf and slaughter it because the father is going to throw a feast right then and there. There is no greater reason to celebrate in God's sight than a repentant sinner who comes home and finds the father's love. Notice here it is not the villagers that want to throw the feast it is the father. In the lost sheep Jesus hints it is God who celebrates but says it is the angels in heaven who rejoice. Here there are no more pretensions. The father celebrates! He wants to throw a party and share his joy with everyone! Then he gives the reason. This son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. The sinner to God is lost and dead but now because of what the father has done, not what the young son has done, he is alive again and found. Jesus is saying the tax collectors and sinners who now follow him were dead and lost. Now they are alive and found. No wonder he wants to celebrate. God invites everyone to celebrate a lost sinner who has come home and been received into the father's love. What were the Pharisees thinking at this moment? Jesus had just unraveled all their careful repentance theology with a shocking demonstration of the love of God and the lengths God will go to in order to welcome back the sinner. To the Pharisees it must have seemed impossible, unfair, and totally insulting. Surely God would not act like the father acts in Jesus' story! Where is his honor? Where is the family honor? The son must pay for his own sins, that is how it works, that is how it is supposed to be! That God would pay the shame-price for us sinners was not in their thinking! I don't think it was in the disciples' thinking either because they did not understand the cross!

The first part of the parable ends with the line, so they began to celebrate. The Pharisees are so focused upon the shocking forgiveness of the father and the restoration of the rebellious, sinful son that they forget there is another character in the story, the older son. They are represented by him and Jesus is about to show that he too is in rebellion towards his father. He

too is sinful and has broken his father's heart though he does not know it. His sins are different but he needs repentance just like his younger brother. Jesus now moves the story towards its amazing climax and in so doing leaves off the ending and leaves the story hanging. The dramatic tension must have been incredible to behold!

**15:25-27** - Meanwhile back at the ranch! Jesus now turns to the older brother. You wonder if the Pharisees had almost forgotten him. He is out in the fields doing his job of watching over his father's and his family's business. He is doing his duty as the oldest son. There is nothing wrong with that. But it becomes very clear very quickly that something is desperately wrong between the oldest son and his father. Their relationship is broken.

He comes near the house and hears the sound of music and dancing and feasting. He knows nothing of what has transpired and calls over one of the servants, NIV, or it can mean child or boy in Greek as well. This is either one of the house servants or it is one of the village youths hanging around the house because of all that has happened that day. It is more likely one of the boys because he says your father rather than my master. If he was a servant he would almost certainly have said my master. At any rate the oldest son learns that his hated brother has returned home and his father has killed the fatted calf and thrown a party in celebration of his return. Not only that, the party is in his brother's honor and his father has welcomed him back into the family. Did he learn everything his father had done that day? Jesus doesn't tell us but it is possible that the older brother now knows how shameful and shocking his father's behavior has been before the whole village.

**15:28-30** - The older brother is furious with his father! He refuses to go into the house and celebrate with his father and brother. Plus, in that culture the oldest son was expected to serve the guest of honor to show honor to that guest but the guest of honor is his hated younger brother! He is not going to serve the very one who has shamed his family and messed up the inheritance. He will not go in and please his father because he is displeased with his father. His father has shamed himself and their family before the whole village by allowing his young son to split the inheritance. Then if he had found out what had happened that day in the village and his father running through the streets to greet his lost son, it would have confirmed his worst fears. His father was losing his mind! Rather than beat his younger brother into submission he welcomes him back and shames himself before the whole village! His father needs someone to put him in his place and bring him to reason! He does not see he too has broken his father's heart and his relationship with his father is damaged just like his younger brother's. He refuses to go in and publicly insults his father! The Pharisees would have been shocked just like the whole village would have been shocked.

The oldest son has publicly shamed his father and caused him to lose face. Custom demanded the father go out and beat his oldest son, haul him inside and force him to do his duty! For the second time that day the father sacrifices his own pride and honor and goes out to his son to plead with him to come inside. This is Jesus with the Pharisees. He is pleading with them to celebrate with him because sinners are repenting and coming home to the Kingdom of God. The Pharisees are the stubborn elder brothers outside complaining about the father's grace!

The older brother shows his true heart in his response to his father. It is all about him. He has been slaving for his father all these years and he has never disobeyed his orders! He sees his service to his father as slavery and duty not loving service. He admits he has obeyed but it is clearly out of duty not love to his father. Then he gets petulant saying his father has never

allowed him even a young goat to celebrate with his friends. He accuses his father of keeping him in subservience and never letting him have any fun, as if his friends are truly different from the family's friends!

He accuses his brother of blowing all their father's money on prostitutes even though he doesn't know anything about how the younger brother lost his money. He essentially tells his father that dividing the inheritance wasn't real because the younger brother's money was really still the father's and not his own to spend. Then his jealousy and his rage at his father come out clearly as he says when this son of yours comes home you kill the fattened calf for him! I can't celebrate with my friends yet you are celebrating with the whole village because of this sinner! Jesus perfectly frames the Pharisees' attitudes towards the tax collectors and sinners in the jealous anger of the older brother and by doing so exposes their hard hearts towards God for all to see.

**15:31-32** - The story now moves toward its climax and hanging ending. The father now tries to reason with his eldest son. He says my son, and it can be translated my boy. It is a term of affection not a title of position. You are always with me. The father acknowledges that his oldest son has stayed with his father. He has not run away and rebelled and his father appreciates that. He reminds him that everything the father has is his because even though the father is still living and has disposition over his estate yet the oldest son has ownership. All that is left that the younger son has not squandered is his.

He then gently corrects him saying your brother rather than this son of yours. He reminds him that he still has a brother who is a son of his father too. He pleads with him to come celebrate, saying we had to. Your brother was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. At the end of the parable Jesus returns to the theme of the lost being found.

Jesus then leaves the ending hanging. You don't know what the oldest son does. Will he come inside and be reconciled with his brother and father and the family be reunited in love? Will he stay outside and continue to insult and hurt his father and refuse to go in? Or will he, in order to save face before the whole village beat his father because somebody deserves a beating for all that has occurred? We don't know what happened, except we do know. The Pharisees chose the third option and crucified their Messiah and Lord. They could not bring themselves to admit their hard hearts and that they had hurt God and were sinful and in need of repentance just like the sinners were. They refuse to repent and so to preserve their honor and what they see as the honor of God, they find a way to kill Jesus and judge him rather than admit they deserve judgment themselves. By doing so they bring down judgment upon their own heads and upon their people. The tension at the end must have been beyond belief. What did the Pharisees say and do? What did the tax collectors and sinners say and do? The rest of the Gospel of Luke gives us the answers. Truly this is the greatest story Jesus ever told and is the gospel in miniature, pointing out that there is no one who is righteous and that we all are sinners in need of a savior! And most importantly God will go to extraordinary lengths to win us back! He will pay the price for our guilt and shame himself so that we do not have to bear it.

## **Chapter 16:**

**16:1-4** - Jesus now tells his disciples a parable. It is one of the most difficult parables that he told.

A rich man has a steward or manager of his estate who was handling all his master's affairs. Someone comes to the master and reports that his steward is embezzling the master's

money or wasting it. The rich man calls him to account. He does it in a very Middle Eastern way. What's this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management because you can no longer be my steward or manager. He does not say directly that you swindled me or robbed me. Or I have evidence against you and you are fired. He gives the manager time to save face in front of everyone. From a disciples' standpoint this is about accountability. You have failed as a steward of my affairs now give an accounting of your service.

The manager knows he has been caught and the evidence is there to convict him. What does he do? He knows he can't go work in the fields that is beyond his strength to do. He is too proud to beg. How will he get another job and save face with the people? He seizes on a plan to insure he still has a future and that someone will take him in or hire him when he is fired. He doesn't quit as yet but he knows his time is short.

**16:5-7** - He calls in his master's debtors. They do not as yet know that the steward is in trouble with the master or that he will probably be fired. They assume he is acting on his master's orders as always. They think the master is giving them a huge break with their debt! The first one the steward calls in and says halve your bill. You owed my master 100 measures of oil, write down 50. The NIV translates it as 800 gallons of olive oil is now reduced to 400; a huge amount of olive oil. The second one he reduces by 20%. He takes the bill of the man who owes 100 measures of wheat, NIV 1000 bushels, and reduces it to 80 measures, NIV 800 bushels. That is a considerable amount of wheat and a great reduction in the man's bill.

The point is the debtors think the steward is acting on behalf of his master. Why wouldn't they? They have no reason as yet to suspect his behavior in any way. The steward banks on the master's mercy in reducing the bills. He knows he is merciful and he knows reducing the bills will please his master. He knows the man's character and how consistent he is. Yes, he has stolen from the master. But he also knows by doing what he did he has caused the master to gain great face before the debtors and before all the town. People will now be talking about how generous and merciful the master is and not how corrupt and shameful the steward is. His master gets great credit and praise even though he did it all to save his own skin.

I think Jesus is saying that when we sin as disciples, when we get caught not acting as we should we need to always bank on the mercy and character of God. The shrewdest way back into the Lord's service and good graces is to throw ourselves on his mercy. We need to call attention to him and not to us. This might be a stretch in interpreting the parable but I don't know any better way to see it. This is to the disciples and not the crowds or the Pharisees. The manager is like a disciple who has been found unfaithful. His strategy is to call attention to the mercy of his master with people.

**16:10-12** - Jesus now adds a saying about managing resources. Professor Bailey thinks this saying and the one about money that follows were not said in this context by Jesus because they don't fit the parable. That is possible but difficult to prove. Luke has shown he is not reticent to place material in different contexts if it serves his purpose but it may be a stretch to say this saying of Jesus was uttered in a different situation.

The point of the saying is all about our character. The parable was about banking on the character of God even when we sin. This is about our character and how much God will trust us with responsibility. Integrity and honesty don't change with the amounts. Character is consistent no matter what the circumstances. The end does not justify the means. God starts us out with a little responsibility before he will give us more. This is the principle of rewarding good deeds

with greater and larger ones. Jesus is telling the disciples if we fail in little things God will not give us more to be responsible for until we learn how to handle the little things. All that we do matters to God. All that we have and manage God uses to test us and grow us so that we can take on more Kingdom responsibility and prove useful for his service.

**16:13-15** - The Pharisees are listening to Jesus teach his disciples these sayings. Jesus repeats the saying about no one being able to serve God and money at the same time, something he had said in the Sermon on the Mount earlier in his ministry. He is warning the disciples and indicting the Pharisees at the same time. Money will compete for our heart's allegiance and we cannot serve both it and God. You can only have one master and if you are a follower of Christ it can only be Jesus. He alone must be Lord!

The Pharisees hearing this, sneer at Jesus. That is an odd reaction. Are they showing their contempt toward Jesus at this point or are they thinking his saying is too simplistic? Or is Jesus getting too close to their attitudes and so they attack him and sneer at him as a defense? Are they acting like a politician who can't answer their opponents position and doesn't have a cogent position themselves so they attack the character of their opponent? I think that is the most likely scenario.

Luke says the Pharisees loved money so they sneer at Jesus. Jesus replies that the Pharisees are the ones who justify themselves in the eyes of people. It is all about outward appearances. God however knows their hearts! What people value God sneers at; God detests! Money, fame, popularity, position, power, influence; all these are the perks of this world and all these God detests! The Pharisees, Jesus says, are running after these worldly things all the while trying to appear spiritual and act like God approves of them and they are God's favorites because of their righteousness! God is the one sneering at them!

**16:16-17** - The NIV groups these next sayings under the heading additional teachings. That fits as these sayings appear random. However, Jesus often teaches this way and in so doing, he follows the pattern of the wisdom teachers in Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. Those books often seem random in their sayings with one theme following another not appearing to be connected. The Letter of James is the same way. Jesus imitated the wisdom teachers, the prophets, Moses, in fact all of Israel's great teachers. His parables were unique to him. The truth is he could teach in various styles and be profound in each or he could be completely unique. He was unlike anyone before or after him!

This saying speaks of the turning of the page in the plan of God. He is saying up through John the Baptist Israel is in the time of the Law and the Prophets, the Old Testament timeframe. Since then the Kingdom of God has been proclaimed and preached. Jesus is saying the turning point between the Old and New Covenants is John and Jesus. This is born out in the way Luke treats his birth narratives. John's birth announcement and Jesus' have an Old Testament character to them. Everything changes when John starts his ministry and Jesus is baptized in the Jordan. Jesus reinforces that idea here.

The difficult part of this saying is the second sentence, especially the phrase, *and everyone is forcing his way into the Kingdom*. The word means to act violently or forcefully. Clearly Jesus does not mean that the way into the Kingdom of God is to violently force God to admit you to the Kingdom. That would violate everything he has said, especially the three parables of *Luke 15*! I think this saying is related to the saying at the end of the Great Banquet of the servants compelling people to come into the banquet. The saying is two-fold. First there will

be opposition to entering the Kingdom from those who oppose it or want to prevent people from entering, namely the Pharisees. They see themselves as guardians of the Kingdom and the ones who deserve it. They want to refuse entry to the tax collectors, sinners and people of the land! In order to enter it there will be difficulties. For Jesus that means suffering. It means the same thing for his disciples. The second meaning concerns the Pharisees. They try and force their way into the Kingdom by thinking that their righteousness entitles them to entrance to the Kingdom. They are so scrupulous in keeping the Law that God must admit them. That is why Jesus adds the saying in v.17 about no part of the Law will pass away. If the Pharisees are bound to try and keep the Law of Moses in order to enter into the Kingdom of God then they must keep it perfectly. If they break one part they break it all! That is Paul's argument in *Romans 2*. The problem is Jesus has already shown how the Pharisees constantly break not only the letter of the Law but also the spirit of the Law, especially justice and mercy! This is one of those sayings where Jesus says something in order to show its impossibility. No one can keep the Law perfectly and be without sin to force God's hand in order to enter the Kingdom of God. Only the Messiah-Servant, Jesus himself will be able to accomplish this feat. He is not doing it to enter the Kingdom of God but to prove himself a fitting sacrifice for the human race. Plus, the Law exposes the character of the individual not just their actions. Jesus' character is God's character. The Pharisees' character is that of a sinner that needs the grace of God! They are the older brother and they still can't see it!

**16:18** - Jesus now moves to a totally new subject and yet it is somewhat related. He forbids re-marriage even while permitting divorce. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. I think Jesus is interpreting the Law of Moses for the Pharisees and showing how their tradition about divorce and re-marriage has twisted the Law's design. In that sense this is a specific example of how the Pharisees have re-made the Law in their own image in order to do what they want and call themselves righteous before God. They think they are acting righteously to force God to let them enter the Kingdom! The Pharisees applied the Law of divorce and re-marriage only to women. A divorced woman could not re-marry or she was seen as an adulterous. Jesus says the same applies to a man. In other words you are allowed to divorce but there is no re-marriage under the Law! You can't apply the Law to women in one way and men in another. The Law about divorce and re-marriage applies equally to both men and women. Jesus short circuits the Pharisees' entire teaching about marriage and divorce. They had twisted the Law to suit themselves and allow serial polygamy. Jesus shows them God will have none of it! By following their tradition and interpretation they are guilty of adultery before the Law! And if they are guilty of adultery then they are not righteous and they cannot enter the Kingdom of God!

If that is the case then these two sayings are not disconnected but linked in a very profound way. Jesus is once again indicting the Pharisees and showing how their works righteousness is a dead end. He is re-enforcing the points he made in his parables from the Great Banquet on through the three parables dealing with the lost, and especially the older brother in the Two Lost Sons.

**16:19-21** - Jesus now tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It appears he is still talking to the Pharisees because the context has not shifted and Luke has not said he is speaking to another group of people. Apparently the disciples are there but so are the Pharisees. This makes some sense because this is about a rich man and his salvation and Jesus had already spoken to the Pharisees about their love of money. Part of what is happening here is that the current theology

of the day said a rich person is favored by God and a poor person is not. A rich person has all the advantages in gaining the Kingdom because they can give more and so earn more favor with God. Jesus blows apart that whole theology in this parable.

Jesus describes the situation. There is a rich man who lives in luxury, dressed in fine clothes and eating choice food. At his gate lives a poor man named Lazarus who is covered in sores and who longs for the dog scraps that fall from the rich man's table. In the Pharisees' thinking the rich man is blessed of God and the poor man and his sores are cursed. To them the rich man will inherit the Kingdom and the poor man will be excluded. He is one of the uneducated people of the land!

**16:22-24** - Lazarus dies and is carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom or side. Jesus is using the popular understanding of Sheol with a paradise side and a hades or hell side where there is torment for the souls of the dead who are apart from God. It is risky to build a final or complete picture of the afterlife from Jesus' parable because we don't know how much he is using popular notions of heaven and hell and how much he is actually teaching the Pharisees and his disciples about peoples' condition after they die. He is not lying but he may be simply using ideas they would already believe and know to illustrate a point.

The Hebrew conception of Sheol in Jesus' day had two sides; paradise and Hades or hell. This was not the ultimate lake of fire in Revelation but like a holding tank for rebellious souls until the final resurrection and judgment. The paradise side of Sheol is sometimes described in Jewish writings as Abraham's bosom which Jesus uses here. The apostles later expand and clarify this idea and teach that we are personally present with Christ in heaven as a spirit before and until the resurrection. That is also reflected here as Jesus does not speak to the issue of the final resurrection in this parable. It is clear however that both Lazarus and the rich man are rewarded or punished in eternity for what they did here on earth. Their eternal condition after death is directly related to their temporal decisions and actions and especially to their relationship with God during their lifetimes. It is also clear that once they die their decisions are confirmed but there is no going back or changing. It's like the store that says all transactions are final.

The idea of the angels carrying a soul to heaven comes from this parable. Whether that is accurate or is Jesus' literary way of saying Lazarus went to heaven is impossible to know. The parable contains other images that are probably fanciful like the rich man talking to Abraham and being able to see Lazarus in paradise while he is in Hades. There is no evidence that anything like that is possible in other parts of the New Testament. Also, this parable is told to the Pharisees who would have accepted the premise of an afterlife whereas the Sadducees would not have.

The rich man is in torment apart from God in Hades. The picture Jesus paints is one of fire and pain and anguish. In other places he speaks of darkness and cold in the outer darkness. Both images are ones of suffering and pain because one is without God and eternally separated from him. The rich man pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus to cool his tongue because of the heat and pain. He is conscious and aware of his situation in Hades. That would be the worst, to live in eternal regret, knowing you could have made a different choice!

**16:25-26** - Abraham reminds the man that he has received his reward because he focused on worldly wealth for the brief time of his life on earth. Lazarus had nothing and now is being comforted because of the injustice of his life. Jesus does not say so but from other parts of his

teaching it is clear that Lazarus must have known God and worshipped him. Abraham speaks to the rich man and not God or an angel. That is curious. He represents faithful Israel in this parable because Abraham was a man of faith. He did not have the Law of Moses. Is Jesus subtly hinting at that here, just as Paul will later flesh out in Romans? It is possible. Moses does not address the rich man and the Law never comes up which the Pharisees must have been surprised at. The issue is faith not works here!

Abraham then tells the rich man there is a great chasm separating the two men. No one can cross from either direction. Jesus is saying our eternal destinies are permanent and cannot be changed. What we do here determines that destiny but once it comes into play nothing can be changed. His picture of eternity here seems to rule out any idea of a last chance in hell to repent. Once one dies there is no going back. Even if parts of this parable are symbolic and not to be taken literally, Jesus' teaching here contradicts the theology of universalism that God welcomes everyone into heaven no matter whether they receive Jesus or not.

**16:27-31** - The rich man now pleads with Abraham to send someone to his father's house to warn his brothers about the fate that awaits them if they do not repent. He does not want his family to end up in Hades and the torment of an eternity without God. Abraham says they have Moses and the Prophets, in other words, the Scriptures to warn them. His brothers can read just like everyone else! This is the first time Moses is mentioned. Again this is to the Pharisees who accepted both Moses and the prophets as Scripture.

The rich man pleads further with Abraham to send someone from the dead to warn them then they will repent and turn to God. He finally states the core issue. In his life he did not repent and turn to God, but Lazarus despite his poverty did. That is the real issue not who has wealth or God's favor in this life. It is our relationship with God that Jesus says counts the most!

Abraham tells the rich man if they won't listen to Moses and the prophets then they won't listen even if someone rises from the dead. If I am correct and Jesus is telling this parable to the Pharisees then this last statement is a chilling indictment by Jesus of the Pharisees. He's saying they don't listen to the Scriptures which speak of him as Messiah and they won't listen even after he has risen from the dead. They will still not repent and believe. In fact they will continue to oppose Jesus and his followers even after the resurrection. Paul is exhibit A for their attitude. He at least believed when he saw the risen Christ, but the Pharisees of Judea refused to believe Jesus had risen and even spread the story the disciples had stolen his body. Jesus prophetically shows them their true hearts and warns them of their eternal fate if they do not believe in him as Messiah. They will end up like the rich man in hell!

## **Chapter 17:**

**17:1-2** - Disciples here may refer to the whole company of people who were following Jesus and not just the 12. It could even refer to the women who helped Jesus and the apostles. There were 120 men and women in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. It could also simply refer to the 12. It is unclear which group Luke refers to here.

Jesus tells them that temptations to sin are bound to come. Literally he says it is impossible to avoid stumbling blocks or temptations or enticements to sin. The word for temptation here is *skandalon* which is different than the normal word for testing or temptation. Jesus says they are inevitable. That means there is no way to avoid them and every disciple will be tempted and tested. Jesus says the most important thing is not to be the person who tempts someone else. I think he is saying you can't avoid being tempted but don't be the tempter. It

would be better to tie a millstone around your neck and be thrown into the sea than cause one of these little ones to sin. Is he talking about children here? In other places little ones can refer to children. If the disciples were a mixed group of men and women there might have been little children with some of the women. It could also be that Jesus is speaking tenderly of his disciples and warning all of them not to tempt one another and cause another to stumble.

Drowning was feared among the Jews because the water of the ocean represented chaos and in the Jewish mind that was the worst way to die.

**17:3-4** - Don't tempt each other or be the cause of someone sinning. Rather if your brother sins rebuke him, challenge him to stop sinning. If he repents forgive him. How often do you do that? Even if he sins against you seven times and comes back and repents each time, forgive him. Jesus is contrasting how we disciples should treat sin among us. Don't tempt each other and be the cause of someone's fall. When another sins rebuke him which means to admonish, challenge, charge, reprove. It means point out their sin and confront it. We are to call people to repentance not be the cause of the fall! We need to be the cause of their repentance. When they repent then forgive. The seven times of repenting and forgiving means there is no statute of limitations on forgiveness. God forgives us and we need to forgive each other.

In many ways Jesus was trying to rebuke and reprove the Pharisees to get them to repent. He wasn't trying to cause them to sin. Unlike the Pharisees who were trying to trap Jesus and find a way to condemn him!

**17:5-6** - The apostles ask Jesus to increase their faith! Luke notes it is the 12 who ask him this and not the larger group of disciples that Jesus has been addressing. Why do they ask Jesus to increase their faith? He has been talking about forgiveness and confronting sin in one another and not being the cause of someone else's fall. I think Jesus' words have shaken them and they see how responsible they are for one another and how high Jesus sets the bar for his disciples for the way they are to treat each other. The 12 know they do not have the strength by themselves to do this. They need faith, so they ask Jesus to increase their faith.

Jesus in reply says it does not take much faith to be effective for him. One can have the faith of a mustard seed and say to a mulberry tree be uprooted and planted in the sea and it will happen. The mulberry tree here is related to the sycamore tree, a fairly large tree with spreading branches and fruit like a fig. This is not a small tree but a large one. Obviously having a tree uproot itself and go be planted in the sea is impossible. Jesus is saying even a small amount of faith in God's power can accomplish what you cannot do on your own. Jesus is saying it is not the size of our faith that is the issue, but the power of God in us and through us. If it is the size of our faith then it is still all up to us. Jesus is trying to help the disciples see it is all up to God! He is the one who will transform us and allow us to do what we cannot do on our own, forgive!

This is one of those sayings of Jesus we need to guard against taking out of context. It would be easy to divorce this saying from the context of Jesus' statement on forgiveness and the disciples' plea to increase their faith in order to be able to forgive. If we do that we can turn this saying into a justification for faith-power to do whatever we want instead of faith-power to accomplish one of the most basic tasks of being a disciple, forgiving one another. The saying isn't about whether I have the power to do the impossible and accomplish supernatural things. In context it is about how much faith it takes to accomplish one of Jesus' basic commands that I know I don't have the power to do on my own. The saying about doing one's duty and not

expecting a great reward reinforces this lesson. Jesus guards us against a health and wealth and word of faith interpretation of the mustard seed saying! Praise God!

**17:7-10** - Jesus follows the saying about faith and being able to do extraordinary things with a parable about a servant doing his duty. At first glance this seems out of place and disconnected with the mustard seed statement about faith. However, Jesus is calling attention to the priority of forgiveness among his disciples. It is an extraordinary thing to be able to forgive as God forgives and to keep on forgiving and it is enabled by faith in God to accomplish in us what we cannot do in ourselves. However, don't brag about it and think you have done something great, as if you are outstanding for forgiving your brother or sister. You are just doing what Jesus asks you to do. You're supposed to do that. It is like the servant who comes in from working the fields, doing his master's bidding. Should that servant expect the master to feed him and serve him dinner before the master even eats? No, the master will tell the servant, get my dinner and then you can eat. The servant knows he was to feed the master besides tend the fields. His attitude should be I am an unworthy servant who has just done what I was told to do. We don't deserve special treatment for doing our duty. Jesus is telling the disciples forgiving one another takes faith because it takes God's strength. But that doesn't deserve a special reward; that's basic discipleship 101! God expects that of all of us and then expects us to carry out our other tasks that he has given us to do. We are his children and his family but we are also his servants and he is our master! Just do your job as God asks you to and don't expect some great reward for fulfilling the most basic tasks of being Jesus' disciples!

Yet the irony is Jesus will reward us for "just doing our job"! Paul's concept of the judgment for rewards teaches us that. God gives us gifts to use in ministry and then rewards us for using his gifts that he gave us when we use them. God graces us and then gives us more grace for obeying him! He is extraordinary!

**17:11-19** - Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem near the border between Galilee and Samaria. This would put him potentially on the southern side of the Jezreel Valley nearing Scythopolis and the territory of the Decapolis, but that is only a guess. The Decapolis were ten independent Greek cities loosely connected together that were not under the authority of Herod Antipas, Herod Philip or the Roman governors of Judea. They answered directly to the proconsul of Syria.

Jesus was entering a village when ten men who had leprosy or a skin disease that the Law treated as leprosy, called out to him from a distance. They were doing what the Law said and not coming near him because they were unclean. They called out Jesus, Master have pity, or mercy on us. Jesus sees them and says go show yourselves to the priests, which is what the Law said to do. A priest had to certify them healed because only then could they be restored to their families. There could easily have been a priest or priests that lived in the area whose turn had not come to serve in Jerusalem. Not all priests lived in Jerusalem continually. Many lived far away and only went to the city when it was their turn to serve. Thus Jesus is not telling the ten men they must journey to Jerusalem. He was telling them to go find the nearest priest. As they begin to go they are *ALL* cleansed.

One of them, a Samaritan, when he realized he was healed came back to Jesus praising God and fell at his feet to thank him. Presumably by his dress or accent or some trait Jesus and the disciples knew he was a Samaritan. It is interesting to note that the lepers had included him in their fellowship. Their need for companionship overrode their racial and religious prejudice toward Samaritans.

Jesus asks weren't all ten cleansed? He knows all of them were healed. He questions where the other nine are, and why only this foreigner comes back to praise God. Then he tells him, rise and go your faith had made you well. Jesus doesn't tell him beforehand that he must have faith to be healed. The very fact he and the others had begged Jesus to heal them indicates they had the faith Jesus could heal them. But here he reinforces the man's faith and commends him for it. Technically his faith didn't heal him, Jesus did. Yet, Jesus gives an important lesson here. Faith allows God to do extraordinary things. When we believe God for something he responds and does it. This man's faith was not a demand or a magic formula as if Jesus was forced to heal. The lepers' faith is a confidence in Jesus' mercy and power. In some senses it is also desperation that Jesus is their only hope. They are throwing all their hopes into asking Jesus to heal them. It is all or nothing. That is the kind of faith Jesus commends here and not the health and wealth, word of faith kind of heresy. Jesus isn't bound by their faith in any way. He responds to it out of his love and mercy. It should also be noted that he commends the Samaritan's faith because he came back and praised God and gave Jesus the credit for what happened. That too is a component of faith that can accomplish great things. God always gets the credit, not us!

**17:20-21** - In the healing of the leper's incident Luke says Jesus is clearly on his way to Jerusalem near the border of Samaria and Galilee. Here Luke returns to a more general setting. Once, when the Pharisees asked Jesus about when the Kingdom of God would come. It is entirely possible that this is chronological, happening after the ten lepers incident. It is also possible that this happened earlier in Jesus' ministry and Luke places the incident here because it serves his purposes of Jesus heading toward Jerusalem. Either way works. Luke has his reasons!

The Pharisees like almost every other Jew were interested in when the Kingdom would come. That question also related to when the Messiah would come because he would bring the Kingdom. Jesus says it will not come with careful observation, meaning reading the signs and understanding all the prophecies perfectly. Jesus has something to say to all the prophecy writers and pundits today! People will not be able to say, there it is! The Kingdom of God is within you or among you. The Greek preposition means inside you or within you.

What is Jesus telling them? The Pharisees were looking for a political-religious Messiah. Jesus says the Kingdom is not a political reign. It is an internal relationship with Jesus the Messiah. The Kingdom of God comes to a person's heart and begins there when they acknowledge Jesus as Messiah. The Pharisees were looking for something external just like their understanding of God was external, keeping the Law and their traditions. Jesus points them to a relationship with him which they could not see nor bring themselves to begin. It didn't fit their expectations!

The Kingdom is already and not yet. Jesus says the already is the fact that a relationship with him is available to anyone who will follow him and submit to him as Messiah and Lord. It is not yet because Jesus first must deal with human sin otherwise all will be condemned and no one will be able to enter the Kingdom because all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. There is no one righteous not one, and that includes the Pharisees!

**17:22-25** - Jesus now turns to his disciples to clarify his teaching about when the Kingdom comes. This is the not yet component of his Kingdom teaching. The invitation and call has gone out from the King to join him and enter his Kingdom. Someday he will come in power and glory to take up his reign. The disciples will long to see one of those days but they will not. People will say here it is, but don't believe it. This happened to the Jews when Eliazer was proclaimed

Messiah by the Teacher of Righteousness, the leader of the Essenes at Qumran, at the beginning of the first Jewish revolt in 66. Bar Kokhba was also proclaimed a messiah as well in the Second Jewish Revolt in 132. Both were *NOT* the Son of Man!

Jesus tells them that no one will miss his Second Coming! In his Day he will come like a flash of lightning, sudden and bright that no one can mistake. Then he adds, but first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Jesus returns to the “already” theme. Now he has come to suffer and fulfill the role of the suffering servant who pays for the sin of all mankind. He must be rejected by his own people and crucified to bear the sins of the whole world in order for the gospel to be preached to all who will receive him and the forgiveness he offers. That too will be a sign of his Kingdom already breaking into the world. The Jews could not see nor would they accept the already-not yet program of God and his Kingdom's coming through Jesus.

**17:26-37** - Jesus then flips back to the “not yet”, and his ultimate coming. What will the world be like when the Son of Man comes? It will be like lightning that flashes all across the sky. It will be like the days of Noah and Lot. The world was oblivious to the flood coming in Noah's day. They went on with all the normal things of life, marrying, eating, drinking, etc., as if nothing was coming or nothing was different. Yet there was Noah in the desert building the ark. When Noah entered the ark it was too late and they were all destroyed. Noah knew God was going to bring the flood; the world did not!

The same is true about the days of Lot. People were going about their normal daily lives in Sodom and Gomorrah as if nothing was happening. Lot had been warned to flee the cities. The day he left fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and the cities were destroyed!

Jesus says the coming of the Son of Man will be in the same way. Destruction and judgment are at the door but people will be oblivious. They will not know what is going to happen. When Jesus returns there will be no time to go and rescue someone or pack up one's things inside. Don't go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife! She turned back and was lost. Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it and whoever loses his life will save it. People will be together in bed or grinding grain and one will be taken and the other left. The words mean to be taken away, or literally received, *paralambano*; and to be left, Greek left alone, to go away from. Jesus is saying don't desire anything this world has to offer. The Kingdom of God and your relationship with Jesus will be the only thing that matters and the only thing that can save you on the day he comes!

Jesus says the world at large will not be aware of the nearness of his coming. In fact it will interrupt people's daily routines just like in Noah or Lot's day. But no one will miss Jesus' coming; when he comes judgment comes! Watch and be ready!

The verbs here lend themselves to the Dispensationalists interpretation of a rapture-second coming scenario. The problem is Jesus could also be simply expressing the fact that some will be saved and others will be lost and judged. Also there was no delay when Noah went up into the ark and Lot left Sodom and Gomorrah. Judgment came immediately on everyone who was left and did not repent. In the Dispensationalist's scenario there is a 7 year time clock that counts down to the Second Coming once the rapture happens. Jesus' implication in the whole context of the passage is that his coming with the clouds, namely his actual Second Coming will be a surprise to the world. The sign of the Son of Man in the heavens, namely like lightning shining across the whole sky, will be a complete surprise, just like the flood and the fire and

brimstone was a complete surprise to everyone but Noah and Lot. That does not sound like a seven year delay between the rapture and the Second Coming!

Finally the disciples ask him where one will be taken and another left. Jesus cryptically replies where there is a dead body the vultures will gather. I think he means that there will be signs for those who can see them, just like Noah and Lot knew God was about to act. But the world will not pay any attention to the signs or even if they do they will not understand them and will misinterpret them. Jesus is telling the disciples pay attention, watch and be ready!

## **Chapter 18:**

**18:1-8** - Jesus now tells his disciples (probably everyone following him and not just the 12) a parable about not giving up in prayer or persevering in prayer. This is in the context of journeying to Jerusalem and after he has talked about how the Kingdom of God will come.

A widow goes to a judge who does not fear God or care about people. She pleads with him to give her justice against her adversary. The Revised Standard Version says vindicate me before my adversary. The NASB reads give me legal protection against my opponent. The Greek words mean justice, vengeance, revenge or protection against my enemy, adversary, or opponent in a lawsuit. All are correct translations of the words. Who is the adversary here, Satan? The words lead me to believe that this parable is not only about perseverance in prayer it is also about spiritual warfare.

The unjust judge refuses at first. Then he gives in because the widow will not quit. The judge says she keeps giving me trouble with her constant requests for justice. Finally he agrees to grant her request.

Jesus then says listen to what the unjust judge says. If the unjust judge finally granted the widow's pleas for justice how much more will God who is just grant his people justice when they cry to him day and night? Jesus affirms that God will grant justice for his people and quickly because he cares for them, unlike the unjust judge!

Jesus then adds a question that goes back to his previous teaching about his coming. Will he find faith on earth when he comes? In other words will his people believe that God will hear and answer their prayers? Will his disciples keep praying in faith or will they give up? When the flood came only Noah and his family were left. When Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed only Lot and his family were left. There was no one else. Will Jesus find his people ready and waiting for his return, still working for him and still fighting the battle for him? Will Jesus find persistent faith, faith that keeps praying and doesn't give up?

I think this parable applies very directly to spiritual warfare and both protection from Satan and spiritual evil and vindication and justice against Satan and his demons. Jesus is teaching us to persevere in our prayers, especially when it involves the enemy and Kingdom issues. This parable is not like the friend at midnight which dealt with God's honor and care for us. This is about us, whether we give up in prayer and about God's justice and care for us in the face of our enemy! This parable is not so much about personal and pastoral issues and bringing them to God in prayer. This parable is about Kingdom issues and bringing those to God in prayer. This parable is about fighting the enemy and overcoming him for the Kingdom of God!

**18:9-14** - Jesus tells a parable to some who had confidence in their own righteousness before God and viewed others with contempt. Since a Pharisee is one of the main characters in the story it seems reasonable to assume Jesus is telling the parable to the Pharisees who have shadowed him along the road to Jerusalem. They fit the profile!

Two men go up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and one a tax collector. Jesus is getting closer to Jerusalem so he uses the temple as the site of their prayers rather than a synagogue which would have been more likely if he were still in Galilee. The Pharisee stood up to pray and literally the words read, was praying to himself. In other words these are the words of his prayer to God. He brags to God and everyone around him that he is not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers or even like the tax collector. He fasts twice a week and gives a tenth of all he has. His prayer is all about comparing himself to others who do not measure up to his outward righteousness. The examples he gives of his righteousness are all religious things that he does, he fasts and tithes. These are supposed to prove his character is righteous and acceptable before God. Plus Jesus' implication is the Pharisee stands where everyone can see him and be impressed by his prayer.

The tax collector on the other hand, stands at a distance. He does not even look up to heaven but beats his chest in a sign of contrition. He prays, God be merciful to me a sinner. He knows his own sin, and he perceives that God does too. His only hope because he knows he is a sinner is to throw himself on the mercy of God and plead with God to forgive him. His behavior in prayer speaks of his contrite heart and his humility. The Pharisees' behavior speaks of a proud heart and his self-righteousness.

Jesus then gives the shocking conclusion. The tax collector goes home justified before God! In Greek the word is the perfect passive participle of *dikaioo*, to be righteous, to be justified, the same word Paul uses in Romans and Galatians to describe God's salvation! Jesus then says everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be exalted. The Pharisee for all his religious efforts goes home unacceptable to God. The tax collector because of his humility and repentant heart goes home righteous before God. That's the gospel. Jesus tells the Pharisees and us that humility is an essential attitude to have in order to enter the Kingdom! Through it we see our need for God's mercy. We understand our sinfulness and we lay aside pride in our own efforts. Humility leads us to casting ourselves on God's mercy and the beginning of faith. God responds to the humble with grace. Jesus also is saying that the Pharisee for all his outward righteousness was far from God. In fact outward religious acts without a humble heart mean nothing to God and repulse him.

**18:15-17-** Crowds were following Jesus as he is journeying to Jerusalem. People were bringing babies to Jesus for him to touch and bless. The disciples thought this bothered the master so they rebuked the people. Jesus stops them and calls the children to himself. In other gospels it says he became indignant over the disciples' attitude.

Jesus tells them to let the children come to him because the Kingdom belongs to such as these. The Kingdom of God is entered by faith in Jesus and having a relationship with him as Lord, which is clear from the rest of Scripture. Jesus is highlighting the fact here that God cares for the children before they are able to decide for themselves. And if they are able to decide he welcomes them. This is a passage that is often used to justify the doctrine of infants and little children being welcomed by God into heaven when they die because they are not old enough to decide for themselves. God saves them because he is a merciful God. Children can receive Jesus and we should welcome them as full believers and baptize them. Infants we should bless as Jesus blessed and ask God's favor for them which he is ready to give.

The most important thing Jesus says here is about humility. We all must be like little children when we enter the Kingdom. Children are humble and trusting. That is the attitude God

is looking for in his children. The Pharisee in the parable preceding this incident was not humble and childlike. The tax collector was. The two pericopes are related by the attitude of humility.

**18:18-27** - A ruler came to Jesus. The word is *archon*, which means ruler, magistrate, commander, chief or leader. Other gospels say he was rich and young. Magistrate is probably the best translation. This was some sort of Jewish official, probably of Herod's court or maybe an official in Roman Judea. The New Living translates it a religious official but I think that is reading too much into the text. Luke tells us the man had great wealth in v.23, so this is probably not a religious official of the temple. More likely he is a judge or bureaucrat of some sort who was very religious and wanted to know what Jesus thought he needed to do to inherit eternal life.

The odd thing is he addresses Jesus as good teacher. Jesus cryptically questions him as to why he calls him good because no one is good but God alone. It is true he is the good teacher because he is God. I think Jesus is trying to press him as to who he thinks Jesus is. Is he simply trying to flatter Jesus or does he see something of God's character in Jesus and expresses that? Jesus pushes him to decide about him.

In the previous two pericopes Jesus has taught on humility and faith as the ways we inherit eternal life and enter God's Kingdom. The ruler's question is telling; what must I do. He is operating under the assumption that he *CAN* do something. He approaches Jesus with his question. Jesus as he does with the lawyer in the dialogue introducing the Good Samaritan points him back to the commandments. The commandments Jesus quotes are all relational commands concerning how we treat one another. Jesus totally leaves out the first four God-commands that speak to our relationship with God. The ruler replies, probably with some pride and happiness, I have kept all these since I was a boy. Jesus replies that he lacks one thing to earn eternal life. Sell all you have, give it away to the poor and come follow me. Then you'll have treasure in heaven and eternal life. The man goes away sad because he had great wealth.

Jesus saw the ruler's heart. He had kept the commandments about people but not the first and most important command; love God with all you are, have no other gods but God! Money and possessions were his gods. Jesus wasn't being harsh with him, he was trying to save him and set him free.

The prevailing notion among the Jews and especially the Pharisees was that the rich had all the advantages. They were already blessed of God and could give more and thereby earn more of God's favor to enter the Kingdom. Jesus explodes that myth! He says the rich don't have any advantage at all; in fact they are at a huge disadvantage because of their wealth! It is such a huge disadvantage it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus is being literal here; he is trying to show that for a rich person to enter the Kingdom on their own merits is impossible! The popular notion would have seen this rich magistrate as a shoe-in! Jesus says he will be on the outside looking in. That is why those he hear him ask then who can be saved. If the rich ruler can't make it what chance do the rest of us have?! Jesus' reply takes everyone back to grace and humility. What is impossible for man is possible for God. Salvation doesn't come because we earn it; it comes because God freely gives it out of his grace!

**18:28-30** - Peter says we've left our homes to follow you. It's almost like he's saying, doesn't that count for something? We're not rich but have left everything. Is that good? I'm not sure he understands what Jesus is saying about salvation here. Jesus wants to reinforce the idea that the Kingdom and a relationship with him must be paramount in a disciple's life. If you leave all to

follow Jesus there will be rewards in this life, not from a worldly standpoint but from a spiritual one. And there will be eternal rewards in heaven as well, namely eternal life. The rich ruler could not see it because his mind and heart were clouded by his wealth and possessions. He valued things above the Kingdom. Jesus reinforces this by saying that the Kingdom of God must be the highest value in one's life. Jesus must be first; Jesus must be Lord!

**18:31-34** - Jesus takes the twelve aside from the crowd to speak to them. Jesus continues toward Jerusalem. He is nearing Jericho on his journey south. However he began, he has now headed south down the Jordan Valley in order to come into Jerusalem from the east and the Mt. of Olives. Passover is several weeks away and the crowds with Jesus must have started to grow as early pilgrims would be going up to Jerusalem for the feast. Messianic fervor always swelled at Passover time. Surely the disciples must have felt it and anticipated Jesus being hailed as Messiah. What he now tells the disciples, even though he had said something similar before must have seemed completely crazy. They were not prepared for it nor did they understand it or believe it. Jesus linked all the prophecies of the Messiah, Servant and Son of Man to himself. The disciples did not until after the resurrection and Jesus' teaching.

Jesus tells the disciples point blank that when they arrive in Jerusalem Jesus will be arrested and handed over to the Gentiles, meaning the Romans. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him or scourge him and kill him. Jesus does not say crucify here but if a Roman prisoner was flogged he was crucified. Jesus was a Jew not a Roman. The Romans only killed Roman citizens by beheading. Everyone else they crucified. Jesus' implication is clear. All of that was incomprehensible to them. Then he says something even more remarkable. On the third day he will rise again. The resurrection is made clear for those with eyes to see in *Isaiah 53*, but for most people it didn't make any sense. Messiah could not be mocked, scourged and crucified by the Romans! Rise again, what did that mean? At this point the disciples did not understand anything Jesus was saying to them. He had told them other things that were difficult to understand and they probably just shrugged their shoulders, looked at each other with questioning looks and went on. After all they were going to Jerusalem! It wasn't until later that they understood. Even after he was crucified they still did not understand. It took the resurrection and his appearances to them to help them comprehend that everything he had told them happened just as God had planned so that the world could be reconciled to God and all the prophets could be fulfilled.

**18:35-43** - Jesus' confusing words are soon lost in a miracle with Messianic overtones. They approach Jericho and a blind beggar is sitting alongside the road. He hears all the commotion of the crowd and asks someone nearby what is going on. They tell him Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. Mark names him Bartimaeus, or son of Timaeus. Luke does not give his name. He hears that it is Jesus and shouts out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! He specifically calls Jesus the Messiah, which is what Son of David means. No one could mistake what he was saying. The crowd in front of him, either from embarrassment or annoyance tells him to be quiet. He keeps shouting all the more. Jesus stops and so does the crowd. Either Jesus finally hears him above all the crowd noise or he finally decides to pay attention to his cry. He orders that the man be brought to him. You can almost see the tension and anticipation in the crowd. What will Jesus do? The man called Jesus the Messiah! Many in the crowd believed that, including the disciples. Some did not and many were unsure. Would Jesus scold him for calling him Messiah? Would he

deny that he was? Would he commend him or maybe heal him? Were they about to see a miracle? Some were there to witness one.

The blind man is brought to Jesus and Jesus asks him, what do you want me to do for you? Jesus does not tell him, now don't be calling me Son of David. He focuses his attention on the man's need and request. He says to Jesus, Lord I want to see. He calls him Lord, another Messianic title with implications that go beyond even that. Lord, *adonai*, or *kurios*, was used for God in the synagogues. He doesn't call him rabbi but Lord. He recognizes who Jesus is and accepts his authority already over his life. Jesus tells him, receive your sight. The word is an aorist active imperative and means literally to look up and in context to recover lost sight. Jesus commands the man to look up and see! Then he adds your faith has healed you (NIV). The word for healed is from *sozo*, a perfect active indicative and literally means your faith has saved you! Luke chooses his words carefully here and they contain double meanings for those to see. Look up to me, behold me, see me because I am the Messiah. You are right. Your faith has healed you, but more importantly your faith in me has saved you. Even before you see you were saved because you know who I am, the Messiah and your Lord. You acknowledged me Lord and that saved you. As a sign of your salvation see! The man calls Jesus Lord and his first command to him is *SEE!* Luke says immediately he sees. Remarkable!

The blind man openly proclaims Jesus as Messiah and calls him Lord. Jesus doesn't rebuke him or swear him to secrecy. He heals him and allows him to follow him. Jesus is getting closer to Jerusalem and openly declaring his Messiahship.

Jesus has just finished telling his disciples what will happen when they get to Jerusalem. He, the Messiah, will be killed and rise again on the third day. They don't understand. Then a blind beggar "sees" the reality of who Jesus is and not only receives his sight but is saved and given eternal life in Jesus. The man praises God and follows Jesus. When all the people saw this they praised God too. Did the skeptics among the crowd now believe Jesus was the Messiah? Hope begins to grow among them. Faith begins to awaken in them. They enter Jericho on a high note. Jesus is about to show everyone what kind of Messiah he really is.

## Chapter 19:

**19:1-4** - Jesus now entered Jericho and because of the healing of the blind man the crowd must have swelled in numbers and in excitement and anticipation. Jesus was the Messiah and he would lead them to a new future! If Messianic fervor was rampant in the crowd many of them would have believed Jesus had come to save them from the Romans. People were seeing what they wanted to see in Jesus, believing what they wanted to believe rather than taking Jesus as he was and as God had sent him.

Jesus is now passing through Jericho, apparently not staying in the city. Zacchaeus wanted to see him, probably because he had heard about how Jesus had accepted tax collectors and had one for a disciple. Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in the region around Jericho which meant he was very wealthy because Jericho had a healthy trade in balsam and date palm trees for which it was famous. Its economy was healthy and that meant plenty for the Roman tax coffers that Zacchaeus was in charge of collecting. He was a symbol in Jericho of Roman power, influence and oppression and was one of the most hated men in the area because of it. He was also short and because he could not see Jesus over the crowds in front of him he ran along the route Jesus was taking and climbed up into a sycamore-fig tree. This was a little different than a regular sycamore but was a fairly large tree with many spreading branches which would make it easy to climb. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus and he was waiting for him when he passed by.

What he expected to see or want Jesus to do Luke does not tell us. I don't think it entered into Zacchaeus' mind what actually happened!

**19:5-7** - Jesus reaches the spot, stops and looks up at Zacchaeus. What was going through the crowds' mind, especially those who hoped Jesus would be the kind of Messiah that would free them from the Romans? Zacchaeus was a symbol of everything they hated about Roman occupation. He was a collaborator and traitor to his own people! Was Jesus going to use him to set an example as to what happens to traitors?

I think the crowd thought so when Jesus begins by saying, Zacchaeus come down immediately or come down with haste. In other words get down here now! Did the crowd think Jesus is going to give Zacchaeus what's coming to him? But Jesus finishes his sentence. I must stay at your house today! That was something they did not anticipate, nor did Zacchaeus! He was inviting himself to dinner at Zacchaeus' house! Luke says Jesus was passing through Jericho. The verb for passing through in v.1 is in the imperfect tense, continuous action in the past. I think Jesus changed his mind about staying in the city when he saw Zacchaeus in the tree. That is why he invites himself to Zacchaeus' home. There was nowhere else he was going to stay in Jericho, but now Jesus wants to save Zacchaeus! Zacchaeus wants to be saved! He comes down from the tree and welcomes the Lord with joy. What must have been going through his head? Jesus wants to fellowship with me! These people all hate me but Jesus wants to fellowship with me! He accepts me and loves me! In that moment Zacchaeus' heart changed and so did his life.

The crowd however is stunned and some begin to grumble. He has gone to be the guest of a sinner! How could Jesus do this? What is he thinking? This man is a traitor and Jesus shows he accepts him! What kind of Messiah is this? Were doubts beginning to creep into people's minds who just a few shorts moments ago had believed Jesus was the Messiah, especially after they had seen him heal the blind man? Jesus wasn't acting like any Messiah they understood. They wanted to paint Jesus into a box and say Jesus you have to be this way because this is the way Messiah is supposed to be. Jesus shows he will not be captive to peoples' expectations of him. His overriding concern is to be who the Father sent him to be, not what people expect.

**19:8** - The people grumble and are not sure about Jesus. They are angry at him for accepting someone they hate and someone they believe he should have judged. Zacchaeus sees Jesus in a totally different way. He is forever changed and he demonstrates it before Jesus, his disciples and his guests who have gathered at his home.

He stands up and declares that half his wealth he will give away to the poor and if he has cheated anyone he will pay them back four times the amount he had stolen. Various laws in Exodus and Leviticus say someone who steals from another needs to make restitution. Usually they must pay back the amount plus a fifth of the value or at least the same value. In the case of a sheep they must pay back five head for the one that was stolen. In any case four times the amount is beyond what the Law normally would demand. It was an extravagant effort at restitution and along with the giving of half of his wealth to the poor. Zacchaeus was demonstrating the fruit of a repentant and changed life. Plus he does it publicly in front of Jesus for everyone to see! Where before wealth and power had been his gods now Jesus is Lord and everything has changed. What the ongoing implications were for life in Jericho no one at that moment knew but I believe because of Zacchaeus' changed life and position in the city things got better and Zacchaeus' witness for Jesus and the Kingdom was amazing!

**19:9-10** - Jesus commends Zacchaeus' actions. He does not say don't get carried away with this. In fact Zacchaeus incredible newfound generosity is exactly what the Kingdom produces in people. The Pharisees worried about tithing their garden herbs and thought they were righteous and generous. Zacchaeus is commended for giving half his wealth away to the poor!

Most importantly Jesus says salvation has come to this house today because Zacchaeus is a true son of Abraham! He is whole and forgiven. Jesus assures Zacchaeus that he is saved! Then he says that he came to seek and to save lost people like Zacchaeus. Those who heard him must have marveled at Jesus' words. A man no one loved; a man everyone detested and no one believed could be part of the Kingdom of God was now transformed before their eyes and declared a full son of Abraham! In many ways this is a greater miracle than the healing of the blind man at the outskirts of Jericho. Zacchaeus is healed too in a far more profound way. Jesus reiterates his purpose and mission as Messiah; to seek and save lost people! He didn't come to judge Roman collaborators; he came to save broken and lost people and bring them into a right relationship with him through his acceptance and forgiveness and then transform their lives. These are the themes of the three great parables of *Luke 15*. Zacchaeus is an illustration of what happens when lost people are found.

Jesus seeks lost people to save them. Sometimes they are looking for him like Zacchaeus was curious about Jesus. Sometimes they don't even know him like the man born blind in *John 9*. If we are to be about Jesus' Kingdom business then we need to be seeking lost people too and bringing them to Jesus so he can save them and transform them. Lost people matter to God, therefore they matter to us! Like Jesus and Zacchaeus however we need to understand that the lost people God seeks will not be popular. In fact they will often be people no one wants to be around or wants to see saved. They want them to be judged by God not restored. The pride and arrogance of "normal" people often gets in the way of what God wants to do.

**19:11** - Luke's introduction and Jesus' parable imply an already-not yet theme of the Kingdom. The king goes away to receive his Kingdom while telling his servants to work until he comes back. He does return, rewards and accounts are settled and his enemies who opposed him are killed. This is a mini-picture of history and tells us disciples are to bear fruit for the king until he returns to take up his kingdom.

Jesus is trying to correct the crowd's misunderstanding of how the Kingdom of God would come and what Jesus was going to do in Jerusalem when he got there. Many believed, including probably the disciples that Jesus was going to Jerusalem to be proclaimed Messiah and to take up power and kick out the Romans. Some, like any Zealots among them probably believed the time for God's holy war had come because Messiah was here. Jesus was warning them that the Kingdom would not come as they expected. I think that is why Palm Sunday was so confusing for many people. It seemed like Jesus was going to take up power because he allowed himself to be proclaimed Messiah but as the week went on and Passover approached he didn't do what they wanted him to do or thought he would do. It is possible that is one of the reasons the crowds turned on him and were so easily manipulated by the high priests to kill Jesus.

**19:12-13** - A nobleman is called away to a distant land to receive his kingship and then return. This is very much like the situation with the Herods and Rome. He will be crowned king and rule under the distant country's authority but he will have the rule and the authority of a king.

He calls ten of his servants and gives each one of them a mina, about three month's wages worth of money. He then commands them to put the money to work until he returns. He will return! There is risk involved in this. If the king is delayed or loses favor with the empire then the servants will be on the wrong side and could lose not only the money but their lives. In v.14 we learn there is opposition to the nobleman and many in his country don't want him to be king. Working for the future king could be difficult.

Jesus' lesson is that working for him is risky. The conditions are not always the best but we can trust that he is the king and he will return. In the meantime we have a job to do, produce fruit for the king; get a return on his investment in us!

**19:14-15** - Many of his subjects hated the nobleman and did not want him to be their king. They sent a delegation after him pleading with the emperor not to crown him king. The nobleman is made king however and returns to rule! When he comes back he sent for his ten servants to see what they had gained with the money he had given them.

Many of the Jews hated Jesus and didn't want him to be king and Messiah, especially the chief priests, Sadducees and many Pharisees. They rejected him as Messiah during his earthly ministry and continued to reject him after the resurrection and the disciples' proclamation of the gospel. When he returns there will be no more time for deciding because it will be too late. Jesus is Lord now and has gone into heaven to receive his Messianic crown and authority. When he comes back it will not be to a referendum as to whether the Jews or anyone else in the world wants him to be king and Messiah. He will come with his own referendum toward us as to whether we have accepted his lordship and worked for him while he was away or not! Jesus will come to settle accounts some day and that includes with us. What were we doing for him while he was away? What did we do with the resources he gave us before he left? Did we bear fruit for the king?

**19:16-19** - The king calls in his servants one by one to give an accounting of what they had done with the mina he had left them. The first comes in and reports the king's mina has earned ten more. Notice he says the king's mina; he doesn't say I have earned ten more. This is very much like the whole concept of spiritual gifts later in Paul's epistles. God's Spirit gives us gifts and as we use them we bear fruit. However, it is the Spirit's power within in us that does the work. We are merely obedient to God.

We bear fruit and then God rewards us for what he did through us! Jesus, your mina has earned ten more! Well done my good servant, you have been faithful in a little now be over ten cities! The reward is way out of proportion to the good deeds. That is grace! God gives us gifts; we obediently use them and bear fruit for him and then he rewards us lavishly for using his power to accomplish what he wants us to do. It wasn't us, it was him all along and he rewards us!

The second servant comes in and he says your mina has earned five more! The king commends him and says take charge of five cities. The rewards are way out of proportion to the actions and yet they are proportional in terms of the fruit. Also the king rewards the one who had raised five more minas. He doesn't say why couldn't you be like the guy who earned ten? He gives him an implied well done too!

The king's rewards to his servants imply unbelievable rewards by Jesus when he returns. I think we will be overwhelmed by his grace and favor. The rewards here also imply further work for him that is greater than the work we do now. It is one thing to invest three months wages and

see it grow. It is quite another to rule over ten cities in the name of the king! Jesus raises the issue of what we will be doing in his Kingdom when he returns!

**19:20-21** - The third servant is brought in and he misjudges the king completely. He sees him as a Bedouin raider. He has hidden the mina and buried it. He is afraid of the king and sees him as a hard man who takes out what he does not put in and reaps what he does not sow. The New Living translates this phrase you take what isn't yours and harvest what you didn't plant! He thinks the king is a thief and a brigand, a pirate!

The third servant is the person who calls themselves a Christian but does not really know the king. They don't really know Jesus. They see him as something he is not and so live in fear of him not love for him. They foolishly refuse to invest in his Kingdom and bury the talents they have been given!

**19:22-23** - The king is furious with the third servant. He says he will judge him by his own words and his own mistaken picture of the king. He declares him a wicked servant. If he really thought the king was a thief and a brigand then he should have invested the mina with the bankers and earned interest on it while he was gone! To do this would have been illegal for a Jew. If he was such a thief what was the problem? The man is not consistent in his own picture of the king nor is his behavior even guided by that mistaken skewed picture. He did what he did because he didn't want to work. It was all about him!

There will be some in the church Jesus will judge this way when he returns. They will be ones he will say, depart from me I never knew you!

Jesus in giving us the picture of the wicked servant implies it is extremely important that our understanding of Jesus be correct. If it is skewed then we don't know him. If it is off then we don't serve him. Who Jesus is, the Messiah and Son of God is critical for our salvation and future rewards!

**19:24-27** - The king says to his servants standing nearby, take the man's mina and give it to the one who has ten. The servants say he already has ten! The king then says, to everyone who has more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing even what he has will be taken away. This is all about a relationship with the king. The one who had earned ten minas will be rewarded again and again with more! The one who did not invest at all and hid the money and thought the king was a thief; he will be judged and thrown out and deprived of even the little of what he had.

Then Jesus completes the chilling ending to the story. The king commands the servants bring in his enemies who hated him and didn't want him to be king over them. He tells them bring them in and slay them before me. Execute them right here! This is the price of those who reject Jesus' Messiahship. This is what will happen to those who refuse to bow the knee and accept him as Lord and Savior. They will be killed, judged, cast out into hell. Jesus will reward his people when he comes and there will be great rejoicing. He will also judge those who think they know him among his people and he will judge those who refuse him. All of this will occur when he comes again in his power and glory!

**19:28** - This verse marks the end of the Travel Narrative. Jesus has now come to Jerusalem and is about to enter it on Palm Sunday. The last pericope in the Narrative is the parable of the nobleman in the far country, a parable about the delay in the coming Kingdom of God and how disciples should respond to it. The Narrative began in *9:51* with Jesus resolutely setting out for

Jerusalem and the parables of the cost of following Jesus, followed by the sending out of the 70. It ends here in *19:28* with him arriving at the outskirts of Jerusalem right before Palm Sunday.

**19:29-34** - As he came near to Bethany which is high up on the eastern slopes of the Mt. of Olives he sends two disciples into the village to get a donkey colt. Jesus tells them they will find a colt that no one has ridden. Untie it and bring it to him. If someone asks you about it say the Lord needs it. This appears to be a pre-arranged ride and a password type signal with the owners of the colt. Was it Lazarus, Mary and Martha? They lived in Bethany and Jesus knew them well. That is certainly possible. Why all the cloak and dagger however? Why not just say go to Lazarus' house and pick up the colt? It could be Jesus is protecting them because of official opposition. It is also curious that the signal is the Lord needs it. That is not a title Jesus used for himself, yet it was a title many of his followers used. Jesus most often used rabbi or Son of Man. Here he uses Lord.

The two disciples go into the village and find the colt just as Jesus had said. He must have sent someone on ahead to make arrangements or he had gone secretly without the disciples' knowledge. The disciples proceed to untie the colt when the owner asks what they are doing. They reply the Lord needs it and the owner lets them take the colt.

If Jesus had pre-arranged to take the colt in order to ride into the city then he is consciously thinking about Zechariah's prophecy that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey as the king of peace. Jesus is going to make a statement about the kind of Messiah he is going to be. This runs counter to much of the expectations of the people at the time who were looking for the conquering military hero who would drive out the Romans. But his actions in Jerusalem also will hurt the Sadducees corrupt temple system which will drive the Sadducees and Pharisees together in order to be rid of him. It was all part of God's plan!

**19:35-38** - The disciples bring Jesus the colt and they sit Jesus on it. Were they thinking of the prophecy? It is difficult to tell. As Jesus goes over the summit of the Mt. of Olives and begins to descend the road down to the Kidron Valley and up to the Temple Mount people start spreading their cloaks before him on the road. As he crests the hill and begins to descend people start joyfully praising God for all the miracles they had seen Jesus do. They are caught up in the moment and begin to praise God using the words of *Psalms 118:26*, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Only they change one word and shout, blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, has the one who comes and not the king. The crowd is proclaiming Jesus as Messiah and king! They add the phrase peace in heaven and glory in the highest which echoes the words of the angelic chorus to the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth. It also reinforces Jesus' focus as the prince of peace; the one who will bring peace between God and humanity and between people and people. He is consciously riding the donkey into Jerusalem and being hailed as the king of peace. The crowd either senses it or is stirred by it or is being swept up in the moment and utters praise to God that they do not understand but the Spirit motivates in them. There are so many undercurrents in this passage!

The bottom line is Jesus is being hailed as the Messiah and prince of peace as he enters Jerusalem for the last time. He is accepting the proclamation of the crowd that he is the Messiah.

**19:39-44** - Some Pharisees in the crowd demand that Jesus rebuke his disciples for allowing him to be hailed Messiah and for praising God the way they are doing. It is possible that they came

with Jesus over the Mt. of Olives and have been traveling with him. Jesus replies if they keep quiet the very stones will cry out! Jesus knows this is his moment when the people hail him as Messiah. He relishes it knowing what is coming at the end of the week. God wanted his Son to be proclaimed Messiah that day. If the people had not praised him then God would have moved nature itself to proclaim him. I think the Pharisees are shocked by Jesus' answer and confused. They would have understood that Jesus was approving of the people's change in *Psalms 118*! They knew this was the last and greatest of the Hallel Psalms that were sung by all the people at the end of the Passover ritual that would come in five days. These Psalms fueled the peoples' Messianic fervor and Jesus was allowing the people to use them and to change them to declare him Messiah! What were they going to do with Jesus? He was getting very dangerous and out of control!

Jesus comes to a place where he can look over the city. Tradition says this is the location of the Dominus Flavit Church on the slopes of the Mt. of Olives above the Kidron Valley and the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus comes there he weeps over the city. *Isaiah 22:4* has a prophecy of the prophet weeping over Jerusalem because of the coming judgment upon the city. Jesus weeps because of the coming judgment by the Romans in 70. He gives a prophecy of that time.

Jesus knows the crowd is hailing him as Messiah now but they will be swayed by the religious leaders in five days to crucify him. He grieves over the city that they will reject him and what would make for peace for God's people the Jews. Now after they reject their Messiah his way will be hidden from them. Jesus then turns to 70 and a prophecy of the Roman siege. The Romans will build siege works all around the city to take it, which they did. They will kill people both young and old, which they did. They will tear down the walls until not one stone is left upon another, which they did. All because the people did not recognize the time of God's coming to them. He doesn't say my coming to you, or Messiah's coming to you, but God's coming to you. Jesus is declaring himself the Son of God, God in human form, God come in the flesh! It must have been unsettling for the Pharisees listening to him. What did the disciples think? They were on a high. Jesus was being hailed as the Messiah and he is saying he will be rejected again and talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. What was going on?

**19:45-48** - Jesus enters the temple. Mark has Jesus coming to the temple on Palm Sunday looking around and then going back out to Bethany. The next day, Monday, he comes and cleanses the temple. Matthew and Luke give the impression that Jesus cleansed the temple on the afternoon of Palm Sunday but the Greek is ambiguous enough that it could be the next day. Mark's chronology may be correct and Matthew and Luke condense the account here. John has Jesus throwing out the money changers at a Passover early in his ministry. If that is the case then Jesus doing it here during Holy Week was the second time he had done it in his ministry. Plus this is after people had proclaimed him Messiah as he rode into the city on a donkey in fulfillment of *Zechariah 9*. That makes him far more dangerous now to the Sadducees and Pharisees than he was early in his ministry!

He begins to drive out the money-changers from the temple and those who were selling sacrifices etc. This business was all controlled by the family of Annas and Caiaphas, the high priestly family. Pilgrims would come from all over to worship at the temple but the temple had determined that they would only accept temple coins so the pilgrims had to exchange their coins for temple coins. When they did a surcharge was added to the exchange and the profits flowed. Then because the temple had standards for what could and could not be sacrificed the people

would take their new temple money and buy animals for sacrifice that met the temple standards. Of course that essential trade was also controlled by Annas and Caiaphas. It all looked very spiritual but underneath it was nothing but greed. Jesus saw through it and understood what was happening. So did many others in Jerusalem, including many Pharisees. They may have been secretly pleased that Jesus was exposing and correcting something that was so repulsive to faithful Jews, yet Jesus was now so dangerous to their power that the Pharisees were forced together with the Sadducees to try and get rid of Jesus and kill him. The Essenes had withdrawn to the desert because they were so fed up with the whole temple system and saw it as completely corrupt. If news reached Qumran about the events of Palm Sunday and Monday the Essenes were probably pleased with the news.

Jesus drives out the sellers and uses two quotes from the prophets, one from Isaiah and one from Jeremiah. Isaiah's is my house shall be a house of prayer from *Isaiah 56*. Mark includes the whole quote and adds for the nations. Matthew and Luke truncate the quote and end with house of prayer. The point is worship and prayer is God's focus for his temple not greed and ritual. Plus the temple system excluded people, especially the Gentiles. The prophetic hope of Israel saw the Gentiles coming to God to worship him. Jesus by his actions and words is affirming that vision for God's house and rejecting the Sadduceean vision of the temple. The quote from Jeremiah is from the temple sermon in chapter 7, where Jeremiah famously indicts Judah for their empty rituals and the official theology that said as long as we have a king from David's line sitting on David's throne and the temple of the Lord where God put his name then Jerusalem is safe from all her enemies! Jeremiah was showing how empty that theology was and how sinful their attitudes were. Now Jesus, who *IS* the king from David's line, the Messiah, is saying the same thing! Their rituals are empty and the high priests have made the temple a place of extortion and robbery not prayer and evangelism! Jesus' vision of the temple is far different from the Sadducees!

Jesus continues to teach in the temple every day that week and the Jewish religious leaders kept trying to find a way to arrest him and kill him but the people were hanging on his every word and they couldn't find an opportunity. It would have caused a riot! So rather than take him by force they return to the old strategy of trying to trap him and lose face among the people. It hadn't worked up until that point but they return to it because they don't have any other ideas. Not until Judas comes to them to betray him do they find a way to be rid of Jesus.

## **Chapter 20:**

**20:1-8** - Luke says one of the days Jesus is teaching in the temple and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, the chief priests, the Sadducees, the scribes, the Pharisees, and some of the elders from the Sanhedrin, came to him to challenge him. This shows that alliances had formed in the leadership to try and trap Jesus and get rid of him. He was too great a threat to their authority and power and they were unwilling to accept him as Messiah. Only two Pharisees among the Sanhedrin, Joseph and Nicodemus, were his followers and that secretly for fear of the rest.

They come questioning Jesus' authority to teach, preach and do the miracles he has done. Jesus does not follow any rabbi or rabbinical school. He doesn't fit any of the ways the leaders recognize that gives someone authority to teach and preach. They don't accept him as a prophet sent from God either. When they finish their challenge to Jesus, Jesus asks them a question: was John's baptism from heaven or from men. In other words was John a prophet or were his actions, baptizing people, and his words from him alone.

They go huddle and discuss their answer. They think by questioning Jesus they have put him in a difficult place. Instead Jesus has put them in a difficult place. If they answer from heaven then Jesus will rightly ask why didn't you believe him and accept him. If they answer from men the people will riot because they believe (and rightly so) that John was a prophet. It is obvious that the religious leaders did not accept John as a prophet, especially the Elijah prophet! That would have led them to see Jesus as the Messiah, something they could not do!

They come back with the safest answer which is ducking the question; we don't know. Jesus answers, then neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. Yet he had stated several times he was doing the will of God. He was only saying what his Father had given him to say. Those sayings are especially in John's gospel. The religious leaders here aren't paying attention to what Jesus is saying. Their only purpose is to try and trap him. They don't succeed.

It is remarkable that they went back to a strategy that had not worked in the past three years in Galilee. Did they somehow think it was now going to work in Jerusalem, as if Jesus was going to be intimidated by the temple and the presence of members of the Sanhedrin? Did they believe the country preacher from little Nazareth was going to be overwhelmed by the splendor of the big city? He had been there before and had publicly and openly declared he was the Messiah. I think they were trapped in what recovery groups call insane thinking; doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results each time.

**20:9-16** - Jesus tells the parable of the vineyard and the tenants to the people gathered at the temple listening to him and listening in on his confrontation with the religious leaders. The parable is pointed at the religious leaders but told to the people. Jesus will show that God is going to remove the leaders and take Israel away from the Sanhedrin. He did in 70 through the Roman invasion.

A man planted a vineyard and rented it out to some farmers and then left for a long time. Tenant farming was common with rich land owners in Israel at the time. At harvest time the owner sent a servant to arrange for some of the fruit of the vineyard. He has the right since it is his vineyard. The tenants beat up the servant and send him away empty handed. He does the same thing again and again the tenants beat up his servant and Jesus adds treat him shamefully. He sends a third and they do the same thing. The owner then decides to send his own son whom he loves, believing that the tenants will listen to him and give the owner the fruit he is due.

The whole figure of the vineyard would not have been lost on the people. Isaiah had painted a picture of God's people as his vineyard in *Isaiah 5:1-7*. He said God's vineyard did not yield a crop but only thorns so God would tear it up and destroy it. Isaiah said the vineyard itself God would judge. Here Jesus says the tenants, those who are to keep the vineyard and care for it God will judge, in other words, the leaders. The servants the tenants beat up are most likely the prophets God sent to warn Israel.

The tenants however know the son has come and together decide to kill the son. They reason that this is the heir and if we kill him the inheritance, namely the vineyard will be ours to keep. Their logic is at once evil and ludicrous! The owner would never grant the vineyard as an inheritance to people who killed his son whom he loves! They are so far gone in their greed and broken relationship with the owner of the vineyard that they can no longer even think straight! The vineyard is not theirs to do with as they please. It is the owner's and they are his tenants to do as he says with his vineyard! Jesus is telling the Pharisees, Sadducees, Elders of the Sanhedrin and priests that the temple is God's not theirs. The people are God's people not theirs. They are

not in charge God is and God has sent his son whom he loves to call them, the tenants back to God. If they refuse then God will remove them.

Jesus says this in the conclusion to the story. What will the owner do? He will come, kill the tenants for their rebellion and murder and give the vineyard, his vineyard to others. God will come, remove the priests and leaders from their authority and give the temple and the people of God to others. The others become Jesus' disciples and even the Gentiles. The temple God allows to be destroyed and all the Sanhedrin are killed or scattered. The Sadducees are destroyed along with the Zealots and the Essenes. God gives the covenant to the Gentiles through Jesus and his church. The Jews did not understand the day of their visitation by God. This parable reinforces Jesus' statement coming into Jerusalem when he paused at the site of the Dominit Flavit Church and wept over the city.

**20:16-19** - When the people hear that the owner will come and kill the rebellious tenants and give his vineyard to someone else they exclaim may this never be! Do they understand what Jesus is saying and who he is talking about? I think at least some of them do. The Pharisees and chief priests certainly did. Luke says in v.19 that they knew Jesus was talking about them and kept looking for a way to arrest him but were afraid of the people. They look to do the very thing Jesus said the wicked tenants were trying to do. They don't see the consequences of their actions for themselves or their people. They are only thinking of their own power and how to keep it. They again are doing just like the tenants in the vineyard!

When the people cry out may this never be Jesus replies with a quote from *Psalms 118*, the Psalm all Israel will read a few nights later as part of the Passover ritual. Jesus quotes the capstone-cornerstone verse from *Psalms 118*. The parable was told early in Holy Week, probably Monday or Tuesday. Late Friday night all of Israel would sing these same words at the end of the Passover celebration! The Sanhedrin sought to judge Jesus, he however was their judge, Messiah and king! Jesus is the beloved Son of the owner of the vineyard and they kill him!

After Jesus quotes the cornerstone-capstone verse he applies it to his own situation with the Sanhedrin. He says everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces and the one on whom it falls will be crushed. In other words Jesus says anyone who tries to judge him will be judged by God and destroyed. The Sanhedrin will believe that when they put Jesus to death they are destroying him. In reality they are sealing their own fate. Perhaps that is what Gamaliel was saying to the Sanhedrin in Acts 5 when Peter and John challenged them. If God is in this new movement we will not be able to stand against it. We may even find we are opposing God. Eventually, that prophecy would come true. God would use the Romans to judge his rebellious people for rejecting their Messiah just as he had used the Assyrians and Babylonians centuries before to execute his judgments.

**20:20-26** - Once again the religious leaders, that is the leaders of the Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests and leading rabbis, return to their strategy of trying to trap Jesus in order to bring some charge against him or have an excuse to arrest him and destroy him. Every time they have tried it they have failed but like the addict they keep doing it over and over and expecting different results each time. Now they do something that is devious and evil in nature and shows how far they have fallen. They would say that lying is wrong and against God's Law yet now they are willing to lie and deceive if it means catching Jesus and handing him over to Pilate. They can't get rid of him themselves so maybe they can catch him in a way that allows them to have Pilate arrest him and kill him. They have fallen into the trap of the end justifying the means.

Their spies come to him with flattering words about Jesus teaching what is right and that he doesn't show partiality. He teaches God's way and the way of truth. Then they sweetly ask him if it is therefore right to pay taxes to Caesar or not. They are hoping by his answer he will either anger the crowds who follow him by saying pay your taxes or anger Pilate and the Romans by saying don't pay your taxes and then be arrested for sedition.

They forget with whom they are dealing however. Jesus sees through their duplicity and lies. He asks them to show him denarius, the standard Roman coin of the time. He asks, whose image, NIV portrait, and inscription is on it? They reply Caesar's. Did they know they had been had when they said Caesar? I don't think so. I think Jesus' answer shocks, confuses and astounds them. I think some of them give Jesus grudging respect because of his answer. Yet because of it they hate him all the more! Jesus says give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

What does Jesus mean? The word for portrait or image is the same word used in the Septuagint for the image of God in human beings in *Genesis 1:27*. It means likeness, image and reflection. Paul uses the same word in *Colossians 1:15* to describe Jesus as the image of the Father. I think Jesus is using a play on words here with the religious leaders. They knew their Old Testament and the important words in it. The image of God is a core Hebrew teaching about humanity. We are all made in God's image. Jesus is saying pay your taxes; give to Caesar that which has the image of Caesar on it, namely the coin. But give to God yourself because you are made in the image of God. Your life and first loyalty belong to God and not to Caesar. God is Lord not Caesar. They knew this but were so hungry to trap Jesus and be rid of him they forgot it. It shows how much they had compromised their faith in order to hold onto their power. They were corrupt. Jesus however recognizes the governing authorities, something Paul and Peter will later reinforce, but he also knows our primary allegiance is not to the state or any human ruler. If we are citizens of the Kingdom of God we owe our allegiance to God alone! Caesar may own the coin but God owns the person! Jesus establishes the principle that Christians are to obey the government and laws of the land, including paying taxes, unless and until it conflicts with obeying God first.

The Pharisees and their allies had thought they had caught Jesus on the horns of a dilemma he would not be able to escape. Jesus, seeing through their plans, answers with a Kingdom principle they cannot deny and that silences all their objections. Their strategy proves a failure again!

**20:27-33** - Some Sadducees come to Jesus and try and question him from their perspective. It's as if they didn't think the other religious leaders were doing a good enough job or more likely that they would succeed where those allied with the Pharisees had failed. Their arrogance and confidence in their faulty theology were unbelievable! Luke notes they didn't believe in the resurrection and so come to Jesus with a hypothetical question that they think is a surefire trap for Jesus! They quote Moses' law of the levirate marriage, the idea of a brother marrying a brother's childless widow so that the brother's name can be carried on in the family and he can have an heir. Their hypothetical situation they think is the perfect trap to expose the ridiculous views of the Pharisees but especially of Jesus and his teaching about the life of the age to come! The widow marries all seven brothers who all die before they give her a son. So whose wife will she be in the resurrection? The Sadducees think they have trapped Jesus in their theological game of gotcha!

**20:34-40** - Jesus points out their misunderstanding of the life to come. They think it is just like the world only better. The Sadducees did not accept the prophets or writings as Scripture but only the books of Moses.

Jesus says that marriage belongs to this age and not the age to come. There will no longer be a need to produce the next generation because we will no longer grow old and die. We will live forever like the angels in their eternal life. Jesus does not say we will become angels only that the life we live will be like the angels. He also doesn't say there will be no relationships in heaven. He says there will no longer be marriage and children and the need to raise them. He implies that our physical bodies will also change. That makes sense when you see his resurrection body. There is physicality to it but it also does not obey all the normal laws of our physical universe. He doesn't specifically say anything about physical or sexual desires here. Any speculation about what happens to our sex drives from this text is simply that: speculation.

Jesus brilliantly quotes from the Scriptures but only uses Scripture the Sadducees would accept. He quotes from *Exodus 3* and the incident with Moses and the burning bush. He says God names himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and says he is the God of the living and not the dead for all are alive to him. In other words Jesus implies that the three patriarchs are with God in heaven eternally. They died but their spirits live on which contradicts the Sadducees theology of human life. They thought once you died you were dead and gone. Jesus shows us this is not true. He turns the tables on the Sadducees who had hoped to show how silly his view of the resurrection was. Instead Jesus shows how silly and inadequate the Sadducees' view of reality and God truly is.

Some Pharisee rabbis are listening nearby and commend Jesus for his answer. They probably welcomed someone putting the Sadducees in their place as the Pharisees had an ongoing conflict with the Sadducees over power in the Sanhedrin. They were jealous of Sadduceean power over the temple precincts and the fact that they were the minority party in the Sanhedrin. Their answer also shows how close at times Jesus' core theology was to the Pharisees' view and how different it was to the Sadducees. No wonder the Pharisees were often attracted to Jesus' teaching and preaching. Yet their twisting of the Law and their pride in their own self-righteousness proved their undoing.

After Jesus' answer to the Sadducees Luke notes that no one dared ask Jesus any more questions. They kept losing face before the people and getting confounded by Jesus. His wisdom was greater than their wisdom which was based on their considerable scholarship of the Law of Moses. Luke by these incidents shows that someone greater than Moses and greater than Solomon is present with them. Jesus is the prophet like Moses and the Wise Teacher like Solomon and the Jewish leaders cannot stand up to him or defeat him intellectually. This must have frustrated them immensely because they knew Jesus had not gone to any of the great rabbinical schools or studied with any of the great rabbis! He shouldn't be able to do what he was doing!

**20:41-44** - Jesus now asks them a question to which they have no answer or at least Luke does not give us their answer. How is it the Messiah is called the Son of David and yet David himself says in *Psalms 110*, *Yahweh said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet*. David calls him Lord so how is he David's son? Jesus is pointing to his own divinity. The Messiah is David's son that is clear from Scripture. Jesus has already accepted that title from the blind man in Jericho. Yet here Jesus is pointing out that Messiah is more than descended from David in a human way. He is also Lord and God! Jesus is pointing to the

mystery of his own person, God and man, the God-man. The religious leaders have no answer. It is possible that Jesus is speaking to their hopes of wanting to control or influence the Messiah when he came. Jesus shows them Messiah is Lord over even David and will not be manipulated.

**20:45-47** - Jesus turns and speaks to his disciples while the entire crowd is listening to his dialogue with the religious leaders and the Sadducees. He warns the disciples to beware of the teachers of the Law, meaning the rabbis. They arrogantly like to be seen in the marketplace and walk around in their flowing robes. They relish the acclaim they have from people and their status. Jesus says they are corrupt and even cheat widows out of their homes and make a show of their lengthy prayers so people will praise them. God is watching them and taking note. Such men will be punished most severely. The religiously proud God will bring low. Jesus has already pointed this out in the parables of the great banquet and the two lost sons. Now he says it again even more directly in their hearing and in the hearing of the crowd! The religious leaders love to make a show before people of their religion but they are far from knowing God!

## **Chapter 21:**

**21:1-4** - Jesus is in the temple observing people give. He sees the rich come and put their gifts in the temple treasury. Mark says they made a great show of it. In the Pharisees' theology they had the advantage because by giving large amounts they gained great favor with God. There were 13 trumpet-shaped boxes in the Court of the Women where people would come and put their offerings. This apparently is where Jesus is watching people give. A poor widow, presumably known by her dress, comes and puts in two small copper coins, two leptas, which were the smallest denomination of coins in use.

Jesus observes her and the rich giving and turns to the disciples and remarks that the poor widow has impressed him the most with her giving. She has put in more than all the others because they gave out of their wealth. She gave out of her poverty and put in all she had. Jesus isn't looking at the absolute amounts. He is looking at the proportion of the gift in relation to her wealth or income. Jesus is affirming the principles of proportional giving and sacrificial giving. The rich were probably giving based on a tithe. Jesus shatters that giving model by holding up the widow as the example of Kingdom giving. She gave all she had just as Jesus will give all he had for us, his life!

The widow reminds me of our friends in Africa who out of their poverty give generously. They have so little and yet what they have they share with others. That is the kind of giving that we need to cultivate in America. Lord help us! We think we are doing so well when we reach a tithe, yet Jesus is calling us to go way beyond a tithe. We need to grow in our giving to become more like the widow and more like Jesus.

**21:5-7** - Some of the disciples are talking about how beautiful the temple is and how it was adorned with amazing stonework and all the gifts that had been given. Jesus tells them the time is coming when not one of these stones will be left on another. Every one of these beautiful stones you admire will be thrown down. Jesus is speaking of 70 and the Roman destruction of the temple. The disciples then ask him when all this will happen and what will be the sign that they are about to take place. Given their understanding of the Messiah and the age to come the disciples might be thinking Jesus is about ready to usher in the Great War that will defeat God's enemies and bring the Kingdom of God. They still do not understand God's program and plan for

the salvation of the human race. Their question may be one of curiosity or one of shock, how could this happen how could God allow it.

They ask and Jesus uses their question as an opportunity to teach about the end times. The teaching is difficult because like many prophets Jesus bounces back and forth between the long view, the coming of the end and his Second Coming, and the near view, the Roman invasion and destruction of the temple. In Jesus' view the Roman attack in 70 is a pre-figuring of the final battle between God's enemies and Jesus the Messiah. The disciples ask for *THE* sign, but Jesus will give them *SEVEN* signs: the false Messiahs; wars and revolutions; earthquakes, famines and diseases; the great persecution; Jerusalem surrounded by the nations; astronomical signs; and finally the Son of Man coming in the clouds. In Jewish thought Jesus is describing the birth-pangs of the Messiah. He is also preparing the disciples for the fact that the Kingdom comes in an already-not yet fashion. He, the Messiah, is here and the Kingdom comes with Jesus, but not all the way as yet. There is more that must happen before the end comes. The end, the final ushering in of the Kingdom of God and absolute rule of the Messiah, will not come immediately. Pay attention to the signs.

Luke may be using Jesus' words to help correct a mistaken assumption in the early church that Jesus would return immediately. Some of Paul's letters like Thessalonians appear to reflect that view, where later letters reflect a more delayed view of Jesus' return.

**21:8-11** - Jesus warns the disciples to watch out and not be deceived. Many will come in his name claiming they are Jesus and the time is near. Do not follow them. This is the first sign: false messiahs. All throughout the church's history there have been false messiahs. Some of the disciples lived to see Eliazer, captain of the temple guard declared Messiah by the Essene Teacher of Righteousness. Clearly he was wrong. Plus in 135 the Bar Kokhba revolt took place with Bar Kokhba being declared a messiah not the Messiah. He too was proved to be a false Messiah. Today there are still many cult leaders who claim they are Jesus, and many prophecy teachers claiming the time is near. Jesus' warning is still very much applicable to our time. Look at the Muslim claim of a Muslim messiah, the twelfth imam or maddi.

Jesus gives them the second sign: wars and revolutions. He encourages the disciples when they hear of these things not to be afraid. The wars and revolutions must happen first but the end is not yet. It won't come right away. This was important counsel anticipating the Jewish revolt because surely many Christians, both Jewish and Gentile must have thought Jesus' return was imminent. Perhaps they thought the Lord would return and save Jerusalem from the Roman armies. For us, we need to remember Jesus' counsel not to be afraid when we hear about all the wars and revolutions all over the world. All this is but a precursor to the final battle with evil. We are not to be afraid. More will come.

In v.10 Jesus gives the third sign: wars, earthquakes, famines, signs in heaven. This is a more general sign that describes many of the others. This would fit Jewish eschatological teaching of the signs of the birth-pangs of the Messiah.

Nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom is another description of wars and revolutions. All the while that is going on there will be great earthquakes, famines, pestilences, in various places plus fearful events and great signs from heaven. When Jesus says great signs from heaven we immediately think astronomical, but in Jesus' day the disciples would have been pre-disposed to see the signs as astrological. Even if they didn't follow the stars that is what the culture believed. Certainly the Greco-Roman culture surrounding Judea watched the stars just as the Magi had at Jesus' birth. Jesus will intensify this sign in v. 25. The point is things

will get much worse with disasters and tragedies of enormous proportions the likes of which the world has not seen before Jesus returns. Are we there yet? We certainly hear about disasters more because of our world media. Is the frequency greater? I am not sure but it seems so. The problem is almost every generation thinks they are the ones who will see Jesus' return. People look at the events of their time and think how could it get any worse. So many generations of Christians throughout church history have been absolutely convinced Jesus was about to return in their time and yet they were wrong! Why are we right?

**21:12-19** - Jesus tells the disciples that before the wars, famines, earthquakes and other signs there will be persecution. This is the fourth sign of his coming. This happened even before 70 and the Jewish revolt. Saul's persecution was a partial fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy. The death of James the brother of John by Herod Agrippa and the killing of James Jesus' brother at the beginning of the Jewish revolt were also fulfillment, not to mention the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul by Nero in Rome. Much of what Jesus outlines here was fulfilled in the apostle Paul's career and his testimony before Roman officials. Many Jewish Christians were forced out of regular Jewish synagogues by the rabbis. The rabbis even added a prayer specifically designed to expose people in the synagogue who believed Jesus was the Messiah and make them leave or denounce the Lord Jesus. By the end of the first century Domitian had instituted the most widespread persecution in the empire because he demanded to be addressed as our lord and god Domitian which Christians would not do. Persecution increased in the next centuries in the Roman Empire until Constantine in the 300's. Today three quarters of all Christians in the world live in an area where they are persecuted. Jesus' words have been fulfilled in a graphic way! They were fulfilled before 70 and in the years and centuries after 70 as well.

The prophecy of persecution is hard to hear but Jesus encourages the disciples by saying being arrested will give opportunity to witness to the Lord Jesus and they don't have to worry what to say because the Holy Spirit will give them the words when the time comes. In fact he will give them such wisdom that their adversaries will not be able to contradict it. This is literally fulfilled several times in Acts, especially when Peter and John are before the Sanhedrin and Paul faces Felix and Festus.

Jesus warns the disciples that even their own families will betray them, which is reinforcing what he said in an earlier time about he came to bring division and that a relationship with Jesus is the primary relationship of life, even more so than one's family! Jesus says all people will hate the disciples because of Jesus. He says this later in John's gospel too; the world will hate us because of Jesus. The statement not a hair of your head will perish is referring to eternal life and not avoiding martyrdom. Jesus calls us all to be faithful and persevere to the end. God has our lives in his hand.

**21:20-24** - The fifth sign is the attack on Jerusalem and destruction of the city and temple. This is immediately fulfilled in the Roman siege and sacking of the city in 70 and later in the 130's in the Bar Kokhba revolt when Jerusalem's name was changed and the Jews were forbidden to enter the city on pain of death.

The disciples' original question to Jesus was when will all the stones be thrown down and these things take place. Jesus says when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies you will know that its desolation is near. His counsel is to flee when you see the city surrounded. In v.22 Jesus says Jerusalem will be destroyed because this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of the Scriptures. It is unclear which specific prophecies Jesus is referring to here, however God holds

the Jewish leaders and people accountable for rejecting Jesus as their Messiah. And God will not allow the whole temple sacrificial system to continue because it is a denial of and an insult to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus the Son of God for the sin of the human race.

Jesus says there will be great wrath by the nations against the Jews and they will be killed and taken away as slaves by the nations. All that is clearly fulfilled in 70 and the Roman siege of the city. Josephus reports that Titus took so many Jewish slaves from Jerusalem to Rome that the price of slaves on the market was depressed because the supply was so great. He used many of those same slaves to build the Coliseum.

Jesus then says Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The Jews never had control of the city again, except for the brief time during the Bar Kokhba revolt until the Six Day War in 1967. Have the times of the Gentiles been fulfilled now? The temple mount is controlled not by the Jews but by a Muslim family with the Israelis providing security. This is a difficult prophecy yet one cannot help but wonder whether Jesus' words are now fulfilled and the time for his coming is near because the Jews once again control Jerusalem.

Dispensationalists read these verses and immediately think of the tribulation and the Antichrist. I am not so sure. The temple is destroyed and has never been rebuilt. It was destroyed within a Biblical generation of Jesus' time. The Jews rejected their Messiah. The supreme sacrifice for sin was offered, which the Book of Hebrews affirms. God used the Romans to eliminate the false ways and punish his people for rejecting his Son!

**21:25-26** - The sixth sign is a more general sign related to signs in the sun, moon and stars; turmoil in the sea and the shaking of the heavenly bodies. People will be terrified and in great anxiety over these signs.

The signs in the sun, moon and star are once again related to what we would term astrological signs and not astronomical alignments or phenomena. These signs will involve bright stars like Jesus' birth star, which for us might be new super novae not yet seen in the night sky. We should look for unique planetary alignments, solar and lunar eclipses, especially over Israel. Because these signs are related to the heavens we need to remember that the events we would see in the night sky have already happened, some perhaps even millions of years ago. What we see is the light from those events reaching the earth at the precise moment that dovetails with other eclipses.

People will also be disturbed by the tossing and turmoil of the sea. Remember that the sea in Jewish thought often stands for the waters of chaos. People will be disturbed because it will appear that chaos is being unleashed upon the coast lands. Most people in the world live near the ocean coasts. This could also describe tsunamis which are direct results from earthquakes which Jesus has also described as happening before the end. We should look for an increase in devastating tsunamis or storm surges and flooding from hurricanes and typhoons.

Jesus concludes this sign by saying that the heavenly bodies will be shaken. Literally the words read the power of the heavens will be shaken. This could refer to the stars which were seen by ancient peoples as representing the powers which ruled the world. It could also be referring to what John describes in *Revelation 12* and the war in heaven between God's angels and Satan's demons. However, it appears that spiritual battle has already occurred. It is difficult to tell exactly what Jesus is referring to here.

**21:27-29** - At that time, that is of the sixth and final sign the seventh sign will appear, the coming of the Son of Man with the clouds. The Lord Jesus will return from heaven on the clouds in the same way he went up to heaven. See *Acts 1*. He will come with power and great glory. There is no hint here of a half-way provisional coming ala the pre-tribulation rapture. When he comes he comes once for all! There will be no doubt that he has come or who he is. He will come as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus says when you see all these things begin to take place, look up, because your salvation, your complete and final redemption draws near. When the six signs begin to happen know he is close!

Jesus will say his coming in another place is like a thief in the night. There is a tension here between no one knows when he will come because he will come when people least expect it and watch the signs and be ready because your redemption draws near. Both are true. As believers we need to watch and be ready because even though we know the signs we can't know the day or the time. That is fixed by our Heavenly Father. Yet we can know the signs and be prepared so the master does not find us idle when he appears. We will be about his work. The bottom line is he is coming back to reign and no force in history or hell can stop him!

**21:29-31** - Jesus tells a short parable about watching for the signs. When fig trees and trees sprout leaves you know summer is coming. So when you see these seven signs start to happen you know that the Kingdom of God is near. The Kingdom here is the final fulfillment. Jesus has said earlier in his ministry that the Kingdom of God is near and it is within you. That was the "already" part of the Kingdom. Here he is talking about the "not yet" part, the final fulfillment of God's plan and reign when Jesus will return as Messiah and take up his kingly rule on earth forever.

Many of the signs have already been fulfilled, especially those that deal with Jerusalem and 70AD. Some of the other signs are happening even now. Some of them have not yet happened. That means that we are getting closer to the time of his Second Coming. We should be getting ready and be watching so that the Day does not catch us unawares. We don't know the exact time it is coming but we know it is coming.

**21:32-33** - Jesus then says this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened. The first issue Jesus raises is what is a generation? The Greek word is *genea*, which can mean generation or it can mean race, or people who share a common ancestry and time. It is tempting to say Jesus is talking about the Jewish race here but I think that stretches the word beyond its normal meaning and the context does not demand that translation. But translating the word in its normal sense as generation, meaning a specific group of related people in a specific time frame, ala 30-40 years, creates its own set of problems. That leads to the second issue, what does Jesus mean by all these things? Is he talking specifically about the question of when will the stones of the temple no longer stand and Jerusalem be destroyed? If so, then he is literally correct because within 40 years the Romans had destroyed the temple and Jerusalem. The problem is the seven signs do not all happen in one timeframe but are spread throughout history. Some are early and still lie within the New Testament timeframe. Some do not come until right before Jesus returns which hasn't happened as yet. How are they all contained within a single generation? There is no easy answer to this. One possible way to interpret Jesus' statement is to say that when the final signs begin to happen Jesus will return within that generation. Given the fact that the earlier signs concerning Jerusalem have already happened one would only be watching for the final signs. That seems to be the best interpretation but even that is not entirely satisfying.

**21:34-36** - Jesus warns his disciples not to let their lives and hearts be occupied with worldly pursuits, drunkenness, dissipation or spending too much, and the worries of life. The contrast is interesting because people use spending money and drinking to escape the anxieties of life. Jesus is warning us that when we do not focus upon God and trust him to provide we are sucked into the world's way of living which is consumed by worry and then escape as a way to treat the worry. It doesn't work and results in a vicious cycle of denial and increasing anxiety. Jesus says if we get caught up into that lifestyle his coming will come unexpectedly like a trap. He will come like a thief in the night and we will be unprepared. We will be doing things when he comes that are not pleasing to the Lord nor will we be about his business and mission.

No one will escape his Second Coming. It will come on all who live on the earth and not just those who live in Israel. The whole world will experience the signs and the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds. That means that the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans is only a type of the ultimate turmoil in the world at his Second Coming.

Jesus' solution; be on the watch, be alert and pray so that you can escape all that is about to happen. And that you will be able to stand before the Son of Man. What does he mean? To escape all that is to happen I think means to survive it. If you are near the coastlands, move. If you live in an earthquake zone, get out. If you live in or around Jerusalem, leave! The signs in the heavens no one can escape. Neither can we escape the persecution but the Lord promises his presence and wisdom in that time. He will protect us and strengthen us. As for standing before the Son of Man there are two ways to take Jesus' statement. First it can mean literally I survive until he returns. When the signs start happening then I know he is near and I do everything I can to stand before him as a faithful disciple. Second, even if I am killed because of the persecution, I remain faithful and so stand before him as one of his children and saints. The bottom line is to pay attention to the signs not so I can figure out exactly when Jesus is coming but so I can be ready and pray effectively. When the signs start happening it means the time is short and the work of the gospel is even more urgent. Prayer becomes paramount. Why, because we need to be ready; we need to be focused on Jesus on not on worldly things, and we need to be praying for all of those who don't know the Lord, the unsaved. We need to be praying for God's people that we will stand up for the Lord and be faithful to him! We pray that we can escape the signs and the judgments coming! There is no sense here of Jesus saying we will be taken out before the signs come, ala the rapture. The sense is we are here on earth when the Son of Man returns!

**21:37-38** - Luke closes his section on Jesus' temple teaching during Holy Week with a summary of Jesus' activity. He would teach every day in the temple and then each evening return to spend the night somewhere on the Mt. of Olives, then return in the morning. Since Bethany was on the back side of the ridge it is possible that Jesus stayed at Lazarus, Mary and Martha's home. That would fit with the other gospel accounts because it is at Mary's home that she anoints Jesus for burial.

When Jesus came back to the temple each day people would come early to hear him. Great crowds gathered to listen to his teaching. This sets the stage for Judas' betrayal because the religious leaders had to find a way to take Jesus in secret or at night because trying to take him by day in the temple would have caused a riot. They were afraid of the crowds.

## **Chapter 22:**

**22:1-6** - The Passover or Feast of Unleavened Bread was only a few days away. The two feasts by Jesus' day had been combined into one celebration with the Passover meal marking the beginning of the week long feast. The chief priests and rabbis were looking for a way to get rid of Jesus because they were afraid of the people and what they would do. Jesus earlier in his ministry according to John's gospel had used the setting of the Feast of Tabernacles to openly declare his Messiahship. It is quite possible that the Jewish leaders were very concerned Jesus would do the same thing here and there would be no stopping him or the people and the Romans would get involved. In that case they had a major crisis on their hands. They knew they needed to arrest him in secret without the crowds. As long as Jesus was in the temple and in public they dared not move against him. Any attempt to do so would cause a riot and who knew what reaction from the Roman authorities.

Luke says it was at this point that Satan entered Judas. Judas allowed himself to be used by Satan even though he was one of the twelve apostles Jesus had chosen and he had been with Jesus for three years during his ministry. He had eaten with him and been sent out by him to do ministry and had seen what God could do through the name of Jesus. Apparently at those times Satan had not filled him as yet, but here he does. Jesus knew from the beginning Judas would betray him but he picked him anyway. Was Jesus hoping Judas would change his mind and someone outside the twelve would betray him? It is impossible to say. Jesus did know that prophecy had to be fulfilled and he would be betrayed.

Judas goes to the chief priests and the temple guards to discuss how he might betray Jesus. What reason would Judas have given for such an act? Scholars, books and movies have all speculated about his reasons but it is impossible to know. Perhaps as the movie *Jesus of Nazareth* suggests Judas was trying to force Jesus' hand and take up his Messianic reign rather than continue to talk about dying and rising again. The fact is even if we knew the reason would it make any difference? Judas betrayed Jesus and there is no way to make him a sympathetic figure. Yet, even his allowing Satan to fill him and his betrayal of Jesus worked out the plan of God to save us. Ultimately even though Judas was doing Satan's bidding he ended up doing God's!

The chief priests cannot believe their luck in finding one of Jesus' inner circle who would agree to turn him in when the crowds weren't around. I wonder if they considered Judas an answer to their prayers to rid the Jews of a false Messiah? They pay him money, perhaps to soothe their own consciences and to placate Judas. Judas for his part watches for a time when Jesus will be away from the crowds so they can capture him. The die is cast.

**22:7** - The day came when the Passover lambs were sacrificed at the temple in preparation for the thousands of pilgrims who had swollen Jerusalem to eat the Passover meal. It was a time of great anticipation and Messianic hopes as well as a reminder to the Jews of who they were and what God had done for them.

Luke notes the timing of the Last Supper and the sacrifice of the lambs. The next day the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world would be sacrificed for us. Historical and prophetic threads were converging on Jesus and Jerusalem at this moment. In so many ways Jesus stepped into the prophecies and let them carry him along and yet he never once was out of control. This was what he had come to do, die for the human race to ensure our eternal life and forgiveness. Even though Satan thought he had captured Judas and would use him to destroy Jesus yet God was in total control and everything happened just as he had planned and all according to what the prophets had written. Jesus knew it too and did not run away. He let

prophecy take its course. This time in Jesus' life presents the age old tension between Jesus' free will and God's sovereign control of the events of history. The bottom line is both are true and Jesus submitted himself to the Father's plan and will. That is what Gethsemane is ultimately about.

**22:8-13** - Jesus asked Peter and John to go and make preparations for the Passover Feast. Those would include roasting the lamb and getting the other food ready. Presumably some of the women who traveled with them would also help with the preparations. Jesus would play host to his Kingdom family for this was a time when the Jewish people gathered as families to celebrate the feast. Was Mary already in Jerusalem? She was at the cross. Was she with Jesus that night? Were his brothers? James came to believe in Jesus later because Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection. It is impossible to know for certain but it seems likely that the family was in Jerusalem but perhaps not there in the Upper Room. How difficult would that have been for them? Here was Jesus once again showing everyone that Kingdom relationships trump earthly family relationships!

Jesus has arranged for a room where he and the disciples can celebrate the Passover out of the public eye. Tradition says it was at the home of Mary (another Mary) and John Mark, the author of the gospel and a companion of Peter, Paul and Barnabas, who was his cousin. Jesus had even arranged a signal for the disciples. Carrying a water jar was done by the women. A man carrying a water jar would have been unusual. Whether Jesus had talked to Mark's family or sent someone else from his circle of disciples we do not know. It is clear it was not Peter or John and it is likely none of the twelve knew either because if they had surely they would have gone and prepared the meal. Jesus knows his time is short and he both wants and needs to celebrate the Passover with his disciples. That is the reason for secrecy and the need to keep Judas from giving away his position so that the temple guards don't interrupt the feast. He is going to give the disciples the New Covenant meal, his Supper, and he does not want to be disturbed.

Peter and John go into the city. Presumably the man with the water jar is watching for them and when he spots them entering the city he goes into action. They follow him to the house and when they enter ask him where the Teacher and his disciples may celebrate the feast. He shows them the large upper room. There Peter and John make preparations. Everything is just as Jesus had said. Was the lamb already delivered? If so who went to the temple and stood in the long lines in order for it to be sacrificed in the prescribed way? We don't know. Luke gives us tantalizing details but also leaves out much of the story. His focus will not be so much on the actual Passover Feast but on the new feast Jesus will institute that night after sundown. The first day according to Jewish reckoning of the three day countdown to Jesus' resurrection has started!

**22:14-18** - Jesus is eating the Passover feast with his disciples on Thursday night, or Friday evening by Jewish reckoning. They are all reclining at the table. Jesus is functioning as the host of the meal and would have played the part of the father in a Jewish home.

While they are eating Jesus tells them he has eagerly desired to eat this Passover with them before he suffers. Then he says he will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. It is unclear to what Jesus is referring to here. He did not eat the Passover again while he was on this earth up through his ascension. Is he referring to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb? The problem with that is the wedding feast is not a Passover Seder. It is a wedding feast. Is he talking about the Lord's Supper? If he is it is possible he is referring to Easter evening and breaking bread with the Emmaus disciples but that is stretching things quite a bit. Another

problem is Passover is a specifically Jewish holiday celebrating God's rescue of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. Its symbolism points to Jesus' sacrifice and Paul notes that our Paschal lamb has been sacrificed, namely Jesus. The most likely meaning of Jesus' statement here is he is relating the Passover feast to the Lord's Supper and the Wedding Feast which will fulfill the Passover and complete it. By Jesus' day there were Messianic elements in the Passover ritual, not the least of which was the empty chair for Elijah and the statement of next year in Jerusalem, meaning maybe the Messiah will come next year. The Messiah was here now that night in Jerusalem. Nothing else makes sense other than Jesus is expressing some sort of prophetic fulfillment of Passover in the Kingdom which would mean after his crucifixion and resurrection.

Why did he desire to eat it before he suffered? I think it is because of the fulfillment he would bring by his death and he had purposed to give his disciples, including us today, his new covenant meal, the Lord's Supper. The setting for communion needed to be the Passover and the specific time of the night he was betrayed. Jesus had gone to great lengths to set up this Passover meal including a secret signal and arrangements beforehand with John Mark's family for the use of the Upper Room. This was all part of his plan to show the disciples that everything that was to occur was supposed to take place. Jesus was in lock step with his Father's will and God was completely in control even though it would appear the Jewish leaders and the Romans were in charge of Jesus. He had told them many times before they came to Jerusalem that he would be handed over to the Gentiles and they would mock him, scourge him and kill him. Then on the third day he would rise again.

His saying about the cup of wine can relate directly to after the resurrection. The gospels do not directly say Jesus drank some wine but he did eat with them and it is highly likely that he had something to drink with the meals he shared with them after the resurrection. Watered down wine would have been the most likely drink because it was the normal drink of a Jewish meal. Thus Jesus is telling them that when he next drinks wine the Kingdom of God will come. It did come after the resurrection. It did not come completely but it did come!

The reference to taking the cup here was probably to the first cup of the Passover meal. There were at least four.

**22:19** - Jesus acting as the host for the feast, takes the unleavened bread of Passover and gives thanks for it. The traditional prayer would have been, blessed are you, oh Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. He broke it, or tore it in two or more pieces and gave it to his disciples. Jesus as the host would then have spoken the traditional Passover words about this bread being the bread of haste that we ate in Egypt but he changes the words. Those words had been said for 1300 years whenever the Jews had celebrated Passover and Jesus changes them! He says, this is my body, Greek my *soma*, given for you; do this in remembrance of me, or do this remembering me. The Greek word for given is the present passive participle of *didomi*, to give, grant or bestow. It often carries with it the sense of giving a gift to someone. Jesus is not talking about his body as a sacrifice and he does not say this is my body broken for you. That interpretation was a late textual variant that crept into the Textus Receptus that some versions of the King James Bible used. Unfortunately the language stuck and many pastors today who introduce the Lord's Supper use this is my body which is broken for you. That is not what Jesus said and it is not the meaning of what he was trying to teach the disciples! Bread was the sign of fellowship among the Jews and many Middle Eastern peoples. Jesus is saying his body symbolized in the bread is a gift from God. Jesus the Son of God is offering himself as *THE* way of fellowship with him and with the Father in heaven.

Jesus ends the bread saying with the command in the present imperative, keep on doing this as a remembrance, a recollection of me. In other words the very language Jesus uses leads the disciples to understand that this act of sharing bread together and remembering Jesus and what he did and who he was is something that the disciples need to keep on doing. By telling them this at the moment he would have shared the unleavened bread of the Passover meal and changing the words he reinforces the lesson so they do not forget it.

**22:20** - After the feast Jesus takes the cup of wine for the fourth and final shared cup of the Passover ritual. Luke says in the same way, meaning he took it and gave thanks for it. Mark and Matthew report he gave thanks for it before he gave it to the disciples. Luke simply says in the same way, implying the giving of thanks. The traditional prayer would have been, blessed are you, oh Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth the fruit of the vine. This final cup of the Passover meal centered on the praise of God for God saving Israel from slavery, but once again Jesus changes the words! Rather than praise God for the Old Covenant that he made with his people Israel, Jesus says this cup is the New Covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. Paul adds the words, do this in remembrance of me to the Corinthians in his instructions to them about the Lord's Supper.

The significance of Jesus' words here is monumental. He is recalling the words of *Jeremiah 31* where the prophet says God will make a new covenant with the house of Israel in the last days where he will write his Law or will on their hearts and remember their sins no more. This will be a covenant that his people will not break because it will be the Lord's doing and by his power rather than an obligation that we must keep on our own power. Thus our sins will be forgiven. Jesus links the wine with God's new covenant but also links it to his death. The wine represents the new covenant in my blood poured out for you. The words mean death. The cup Jesus clearly links to his death and the shedding of his blood to ratify the new covenant of God with his people. In Jewish thought no covenant was made without a sacrifice and the shedding of blood. Jesus is saying he will be the sacrifice himself. Further the word for poured out is a present passive participle, implying that Jesus will be sacrificed but someone will kill him he will not kill himself. This would agree with his prophecies of his death which he spoke to the disciples before he came to Jerusalem in which he stated he would be arrested, scourged and put to death, or crucified.

Jesus' words would also be jarring to the disciples in another way. The Jews were forbidden to drink blood by the Law because it was associated with pagan rituals. Here Jesus gives them a new ritual to do, related to the new covenant of God, where the wine symbolizes his poured out, sacrificed blood. Jesus said drink the wine not the blood, but the symbolism of the wine is clearly his blood. Did it make the disciples nervous? Did they wonder what he meant? Did some recoil at drinking the cup because Jesus directly linked it with drinking his blood? A few decades later Roman critics of Christians would claim they were cannibals that ate flesh and drank blood in their rituals because of the Lord's Supper. At any rate because of the jarring nature of Jesus' words, the link with the New Covenant of Jeremiah, and the fact Jesus changes the words of the last cup of the Passover meal the disciples remembered Jesus' words, linked them with the words about the bread and very early in the church's life began to celebrate what they called the Lord's Supper or Lord's Table. Later, probably because of the symbol of the bread for fellowship it became known as communion. Finally because of the prayer of thanks for both the bread and the cup the simple ritual meal became known as the Eucharist because of the Greek word for thanks, *eucharisteo*. Luke adds one more title to the meal based off of Jesus'

post-resurrection appearance to the disciples in Emmaus on Easter evening, the breaking of the bread.

**22:21-23** - Jesus has just finished giving the disciples the cup when he announces one of them will betray him. He tells them this has been prophesied but woe or judgment is coming to the one who does it. Jesus knows this must be fulfilled but what must have been going through his mind at that moment? This was the Passover! These were his best friends! How could one of them do this?! The prophecy to which he is referring is probably *Zechariah 11:12-17* or it could be more general and refer to his cross in which case *Isaiah 53* is most probable. The point is right as Jesus is giving them the Lord's Supper and telling them how much he has longed to celebrate this Passover with them he must tell them news that must have broken his heart. No wonder Gethsemane was so difficult. The full implication of human sin was coming upon the Lord that night but for Jesus it wasn't just a spiritual reality it was personal. Judas, one of his own was going to betray him!

**22:24-27** - Luke tells us that at some point during the meal a dispute arose among them about who was greatest. The verb is an aorist of *ginomai* which means it began to happen. The word for dispute is a contention. They had an argument during the Passover meal! Luke does not specifically say this immediately followed Jesus' announcement of his betrayal which could mean the argument happened at another point in the meal. That means their argument is probably the setting for Jesus washing the disciples feet in *John 13*. It is possible the argument arose because they were trying to determine who was the least among them because then he would have been obligated to wash everyone's feet. Jesus short circuits their debate by humbling himself and setting the example of service for all of them. John reports that Judas was going to betray him but had not yet left. That means that Jesus washed Judas' feet too!

Jesus summarizes the lesson about service for the disciples by reiterating what he told them during another argument about who was the greatest earlier in his ministry. The Gentiles lord it over their subjects and call themselves Benefactors but I am among you as one who serves. Theophilus is probably Luke's patron or benefactor. One wonders what Theophilus thought of Jesus' words here? Jesus then asks them who is greater, the servant or the ruler? Jesus says the servant is greater because that is what he came to do and he is the Messiah! Follow my example. If you couple this with him washing their feet this was a powerful moment during the Passover meal. However, how disappointing it must have been for Jesus that he had to stop them from arguing about position and face. It was one more sign that sin was rampant in the human race and that without the cross there was absolutely no hope that people would change. Jesus' mission was the only way! The Holy Spirit's presence was the only hope for God's character to grow in people and overcome sin. It would have brought him back to the lesson of the Supper he had just given them. I think he knew that over time in the months and years ahead with the Supper to help them remember they would begin to change and begin to live as Jesus had modeled for them and called them to live. It must have been a bittersweet moment for him.

**22:28-30** - Given the bittersweet nature of the moment I think this is why Jesus now says what he says. The disciples have demonstrated how broken and sinful they are and yet to them Jesus says he will give the Kingdom. He says they have stood by him in his trials. That is true at least up to a point. There will come a time that night that they will all desert him. But the disciples have been with Jesus through all the hardships of his three year ministry and now this week in

Jerusalem. It is to them, his friends, despite all their flaws, that he will give the Kingdom. The Father has given Jesus rule over all things and now Jesus will give them a share in his Kingdom to rule with him. It is a statement of grace because who among them deserves that Kingdom? Who among them is fit to rule with him? The dialogue with Peter that immediately follows this and Peter's blustering about not denying Jesus is especially poignant in its timing. Even Peter does not deserve what Jesus is saying here. But the New Covenant will change them and make them fit. That is what Jesus has given them through the sign of his Supper. When he returns and takes up his reign they will rule with him and judge all Israel itself!

Luke is very purposeful in juxtapositioning these sayings and incidents during the Passover meal. There is such a contrast between what Jesus will give them and his sacrifice for them and the disciples' behavior and petty squabbings. Jesus is going to die for them and the need for his death, resurrection and giving of the Spirit is never more apparent than here, the night he is betrayed. If he does not complete his mission sin wins, and the human race will never change. The disciples had been with Jesus for three years, eaten with him, ministered with him, shared everything with him and been sent out in his name and seen and done great things in his name. Even more so than Israel itself in the wilderness they had seen God at work in those three years. Now at the end of all of that the best they can do is argue and squabble about who is the greatest, deny him and even betray him. The disciples at the Passover feast are exhibit A for the need for internal change in the human heart and for God to something by his grace and power. Nothing else will work. We have no hope without Christ, his cross and resurrection!

**22:31-34** - Jesus now tells Peter as the leader that he has prayed for Simon and for all of them. The you, of this verse is plural in Greek. He addresses Peter as Simon, his given name. I think he does this on purpose, trying to show him that he cannot be Peter on his own; he will need the Lord's power and strength but that will only come after his cross and resurrection when the Spirit comes. Peter resists the idea and still believes he can be Peter, the rock, on his own.

Jesus tells Simon that Satan has asked to sift all of them like wheat. He desires to put them through a spiritual sieve to test them in order to destroy them. Satan wants to expose the disciples' weaknesses. In so doing he will fulfill Zechariah's prophecy that when the shepherd is struck the sheep will be scattered. All of what happens this night, the next day and on into Sunday will be a fulfillment of prophecy! Jesus has compassion on Peter here. He tells them Satan has asked to hurt you all, but Simon I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. When you have turned back strengthen your brothers. Jesus knows the disciples look to Simon as their leader and they will need him in the end to rally them and to strengthen them for what is to come. Jesus is both warning Simon here and encouraging him. He knows they will all run away in fear before this night is out.

There is something else here too. Satan has asked to sift you all like wheat. God is in charge. Jesus protects us. No trial that comes to us gets to us unless God allows it for our good in order to strengthen us and make us more like him. Sometimes those trials are awful, just as they were for Simon. Sometimes we fail, just like Simon did. Sometimes we succeed. Remember Simon did not yet have the Holy Spirit in him. Later after Pentecost when he did, he was able to meet new trials that were even harder than what he faced the night Jesus was betrayed and conquer them, including the manner in which he died. Simon became Peter because of what Jesus had done for him. All this implies there are some trials that Jesus does not allow Satan to test us with. If that is the case, then whatever we face the Lord knows we can endure it and things that will absolutely destroy us he protects us from.

Peter is not ready to accept that idea or the idea that he will fail the Lord Jesus in his hour of need. Remember Jesus has already told them one of them will betray him. They know something bad is coming. Simon in his blustery way exclaims that he is ready to go to prison and death with Jesus! Jesus' answer speaks volumes about the real struggle going on here. He says, will you Peter, Rock? Before the rooster crows today you will deny three times that you even know me! Since it is now after sunset it is Friday by the Jewish reckoning. The rooster will crow near sunrise Friday, which is already today. Simon tries to state his courage to Jesus and tell him he will never deny him. He is the Rock! He is Peter! Jesus scolds him and warns him that if he tries to be Peter, Rock, on his own strength he will deny even knowing Jesus at all! It is even worse. He won't even be able to acknowledge Jesus before the servant girl at Caiaphas' house! Simon cannot be Peter in his own strength, even though he wanted to more than anything! I think he desperately wanted to prove Jesus' choice of him as leader to Jesus and to all the disciples, but he didn't have the strength and character on his own and in his pride he sets himself up for failure. Jesus knew this and tries to gently tell Simon that he knows he will fail as they all will. But Jesus has prayed for him and when he turns back, meaning when he comes back to Jesus and repents of his cowardice, his brothers will need his leadership and strength. This test will humble Peter as few things in his life would but he will be the stronger for it and in the end it will prepare him to receive the Holy Spirit and become the Rock that Jesus had prophesied he would be. Simon would be the Rock upon whom Jesus would found his church.

**22:35-38** - Jesus now asks them if when he sent them out two by two in mission for him did they lack anything? They say, no Lord. Now Jesus warns them that if they have a bag or a purse, take it. If they don't have a sword, sell something and buy one. It seems such a contradiction to his earlier teachings! Jesus knows however that the time of fulfillment is at hand that is so different than the time of his mission of declaring the Kingdom with them and teaching them. He quotes *Isaiah 53* that he will be numbered among the transgressors and whatever is written about him will now all be fulfilled. Jesus has purposely stepped into the stream of prophecy about him. He is not manipulating events to suit his own ends, which is impossible; he is allowing them to unfold as God has prophesied to his people centuries before. He will not resist them. He will embrace the events and fulfill them. Now here he counsels the disciples to protect themselves because events must take their course. He is not saying don't trust God but be prepared for the worst because the worst is at hand. Of course the disciples will misinterpret his words, take at least two swords, and Peter or one of the others will cut off the ear of the high priest's slave trying to protect Jesus. Jesus does not need protecting, the disciples do. The swords are for them, not him.

The disciples say here are two swords and Jesus replies it is enough. They don't all need to arm themselves but what they have they need to be prepared to use. He is concerned for their well-being not his own. Jesus knows nothing the disciples do or don't do can stop his suffering and death now. Events will take place as it is written about him. This is why he came into the world, for this very moment. Jesus' concern here is for his friends because he knows that they will be swept up into the chaos of the next few hours and he wants them to be as safe as they can be. He is not interested in taking the Kingdom of God by force. He knows it will not come that way. It will come as he submits himself to the Father's will that he suffer and die for the sins of humanity. The disciples will misinterpret his meaning but Jesus at least tries to tell them because he loves them and has pity on them.

This is very good counsel as we near Jesus' return. We need to continue to trust God yet protect ourselves and be prepared for the worst that might come. That means financially,

physically, spiritually, emotionally and relationally we need to be prepared. I don't think Jesus' counsel here means I need to buy a gun, but I need to think through what might be the legal and moral challenges that lie ahead and how I can be ready for them. The truth is things are going to get much worse before they get better and the Lord returns!

**22:39-46** - Luke says Jesus went out to the Mt. of Olives and the disciples followed him. Luke and Matthew identify the place as Gethsemane, where there was an olive grove on the lower slopes of the mountain, just up from the Kidron Valley opposite the Golden Gate on the east side of the temple mount. Luke mentions the disciples are following him. The only one who isn't is Judas who has gone to the high priests to tell them that Jesus is alone and in a place that is not public. Now is there time to arrest him.

When they reach Gethsemane Jesus asks them to pray, the Greek is in the imperative mood, in order that they not fall into temptation. Jesus knows his trial is coming and he wants the disciples to be protected. Even though he knows they will all fall away he still calls them to pray. There is always a chance that they will choose differently. We too should give people a chance to change even when we are certain they will not. This is similar to the Lord's Prayer and lead us not into temptation.

Jesus goes about a stone's throw away and kneels down to pray. Mark notes he took Peter, James and John with him a little farther and threw himself to the ground in prayer. Luke leaves those details out, presumably because Mark included them and here is one of those places where Luke did not feel the need to repeat what the other gospel writers had already written, especially since he was probably using Mark's account as one of his chief sources. Jesus does not pray if it be your will, but if you are willing. In the end his prayer is focused on not my will but yours be done. Luke adds the details that an angel from heaven comes to strengthen him at this moment. He does not tell us what the angel did. He also adds that Jesus was in anguish, meaning agony of spirit. He prayed all the more earnestly or fervently. The word can mean stretched out. Now Jesus goes beyond the normal posture of prayer, kneeling, and throws himself on the ground in pain and grief over what has already happened with Judas' betrayal and what is to come, his trial and the cross. The cup from the Father's hand filled with the wrath of God for human sin he is about to take. His prayer in Gethsemane is one last attempt to see if there is any other way. He knows there is not, but the awful weight of what is about to occur is crushing him. Luke says his prayer is so intense that he sweats great drops of sweat like blood. Some ancient manuscripts do not have the verses about the angel and Jesus' intense prayer, vv.43-44. The best manuscripts do.

Jesus' wrestling in prayer with his Father over the final steps needed to save the human race, the cross, is strengthened and made ready for his trial and crucifixion. Isaiah says like a lamb before its shearers is dumb so Jesus will not speak out and defend himself. The gospels report it just that way. He speaks a few words but makes no defense before either the Sanhedrin or Pilate. Before the high priest he will even admit he is the Messiah, which condemns him to death. He does not rail against the Romans for the injustice of it all and on the cross he forgives his executioners. Whence came the strength to bear such injustice and pain? Here, in prayer, at Gethsemane; Jesus wins the battle of his soul and submits himself to his Father's will. We need to also remember that the spiritual battles we face are most often won or lost on our knees before God before the battle is actually joined. Prayer is the key to victory just as it was for Jesus.

When he has finished praying he returns to the disciples who are fast asleep from a large meal, a late night and grief over the events of the evening. Who of them will betray Jesus? He

has told Peter he will deny him three times before morning. Jesus has specifically spoken of his death again. He washed our feet as we were arguing over who was the greatest! How could we have done such a thing? What should have been a happy time of reflecting on the celebration is now tainted by sorrow, questions and grief over what they had done and their Master's mood. Jesus comes and asks them why are they sleeping. He commands them to pray again that they not fall into temptation, but it is too late. Judas has come with the temple guards. Jesus has submitted himself to the Father's will and Isaiah says it was the will of the Lord to crush him and sacrifice his One and Only Son for us. Events will now play out just as God has planned them, and the Son of Man will be crucified for you and me. It will appear for a time that Satan has won, but Jesus is the true victor. His battle has been fought and won in prayer.

**22:47-53** - While Jesus is exhorting the disciples to wake up and keep praying so they don't fall into temptation Judas arrives with a contingent of temple guards along with some of the chief priests and Sanhedrin. He approaches Jesus to give him the kiss of greeting and Jesus challenges him, asking him if he is betraying the Son of Man with a kiss. It is as if Jesus is giving Judas one last chance to turn back rather than betray him. Judas' betrayal was prophesied and must be fulfilled but our actions are never determined; we always have a free choice. God does not remove that from us. Satan is the one who tries to control us and remove our freedom. Judas seals his fate by kissing Jesus and handing him over to the guards.

The disciples see what is going on and ask Jesus if they should defend him and fight. One of them doesn't wait for the Lord's answer but strikes the high priest's slave, cutting off his ear. John's gospel reports that it was Peter and the high priest's slave was named Malchus. Jesus takes control of the moment before it gets out of hand and stops it. He is trying to protect the disciples and even the guards who have come to arrest him. He heals the slave's ear and questions the guards and religious leaders who have come in the night to arrest him. He asks them if he is leading a rebellion that they have come with swords and clubs. He points out their cowardice in noting that every day he had been teaching in the temple courts and they have had ample opportunity to take him. Then he adds, this is your hour, when darkness reigns. The Greek word translated reigns is *exousia*, which means power or authority. Literally the sentence reads, but this is your hour and the power of darkness. The New Living translates it: but this is your moment, the time when the power of darkness reigns. Jesus' implication is God has handed over authority of his Son to the power of darkness, to Satan and the forces of spiritual evil represented in Gethsemane by Judas, the guards and the religious officials. This is all part of God's plan and Jesus has done the best he could in protecting his friends and minimizing violence during his arrest. The swords Jesus had spoken about had been to protect the disciples from harm. They had unfortunately tried to protect Jesus and had wounded the high priest's slave. Once again the disciples do not understand what is going on and they misinterpret Jesus' instructions to them.

For Jesus this was a long anticipated moment but it must have been incredibly sad and disappointing. Judas had actually betrayed him. The disciples had misunderstood him again and almost gotten someone killed. The leaders of the Jewish faith had shown their ultimate allegiance and sided with the devil himself, willing to do anything to get rid of Jesus and preserve their power. They had displayed their cowardice and Jesus had exposed them. Now Jesus submits himself to their power and control. It appears on the surface that he is helpless and bereft of freedom and the power to do anything to stop them. Yet, if one probes deeper into Luke's narrative it is Jesus who is in complete control and the Jewish leaders are the ones being manipulated and controlled by outside forces, namely the powers of darkness. Who was truly

free that night, the Jewish leaders or Jesus? Luke's answer is Jesus. He goes willingly to his suffering and death.

**22:54-55** - The soldiers, meaning the temple guards, along with the high priests and officials take Jesus to Caiaphas' house, the villa of the high priest. It is to the south above the Kidron Valley looking somewhat northeast to the Mt. of Olives. It is in the old city or City of David. The ancient road runs the length of the Kidron Valley from Gethsemane south down the valley to some steps that turn west and lead up out of the valley to Caiaphas' house. Those steps still exist today and would have been the very steps the soldiers took to lead Jesus to the high priest's residence. In the lower levels under the modern church is a dungeon where prisoners were kept for interrogation. It is likely Jesus was held there for a time as the rest of the Sanhedrin was hastily called together for a trial. There are holes in the stone in that dungeon that the chains for prisoners would be attached through in order to hold them. Jesus was probably attached to these chains and kept there. The Son of God was chained like a common criminal in the dungeon of the house of the high priest of Israel!

Peter follows the whole procession at a distance. It was dark and he probably hung back in the shadows far enough so that he was not seen. John's gospel says another disciple also went with Peter. Some believe that was John although he does not identify that disciple as the one Jesus loved which is his normal saying. John reports that this disciple knew the high priest. It is highly unlikely that John, a young fisherman from Galilee, knew the high priest and his family. It is unclear therefore which disciple went with Peter. Peter joins the guards around a fire in the courtyard of Caiaphas' house. The gospels don't tell us what he hoped to do in following Jesus. However, it is probable that he was holding himself to his statement that he would never deny Jesus and would even go to prison or death for him. As we shall see Peter could not hold to his promise and in all likelihood he was very afraid in that courtyard sitting around the fire with the very guards who had arrested Jesus and took him away.

**22:56-60** - A servant girl comes through the courtyard, perhaps offering water or wine to the guards or even food, it is unclear. She sees Peter, stares at him and exclaims this man was with Jesus. How did she know that? Had she seen Peter with Jesus in the temple? It is almost certain that she was not with the guards and the priests in Gethsemane a few hours earlier. It was late Friday night and a lone woman would not be out after dark with a group of men. It is most likely she had seen Jesus at the temple teaching and recognized Peter as one of his disciples. Her identifying Peter must have caused him to panic, because when she points him out to the guards he says, woman I don't know him! The disciple who had sworn he would even die with Jesus now in his panic and fear cannot even declare his loyalty to his Lord to a servant girl. What must have been going through his head after those words came out of his mouth? Perhaps at this point Peter began to think coming into the courtyard sitting with the guards may not have been such a good idea.

A little later a man, perhaps a guard, but someone in the courtyard says you were also one of them. Again Peter denies it. Man I am not! About an hour later another asserted that Peter was with Jesus because he is a Galilean. Peter vehemently responds with, I don't know what you are talking about! At least one other gospel reports Peter cursing at this point. How did the man know Peter was a Galilean? Perhaps there was something in his dress or smell or more likely accent to his speech. There was some identifying mark that led the man to identify Peter as from Galilee. Notice also that Luke says at least an hour had passed from the second denial to the

third. All that time Jesus is being held below in the dungeon and Peter is in the courtyard with the guards. Is he talking? Is he being silent? My guess is he was talking because the man says he is from Galilee and I think Peter's speech gave him away. Peter has now denied his Lord three times in fear and panic. Just as he finishes denying the Lord for the third time the rooster crows. Jesus' prophecy has come true. Peter has been unable to stand firm for his Lord.

**22:61-62** - The rooster crows and only Luke adds the detail that Jesus looked straight at Peter. What does that mean and how did that happen? The only reasonable explanation is that the Sanhedrin had finally gathered inside the house and the guards were moving Jesus from the dungeon below the house up into the area where the high priests and the elders would hear Jesus' case. They must have chosen to take Jesus through the courtyard or perhaps that was the normal route from the dungeon to the upper levels of Caiaphas' home. We don't know. But Luke tells us that just at that moment when the rooster crowed Jesus was being led bound through the courtyard and he happens to spot Peter and look at him. What was communicated in that look? Disgust, anger, I told you so; or compassion, love and forgiveness? I think it is the latter because that is the character of Jesus. I think Jesus' look communicated his love to Peter, his disappointment that he had fallen, because Jesus knows. And I think by his look he is trying to help Peter remember his words to him that after he has fallen, keep faith and strengthen his brothers. They still need him.

For Peter, Jesus' look must have slain him because Luke tells us it is at that moment that Peter remembers Jesus' words that before the rooster crows he will deny Jesus three times. Peter had said no Lord I will go to prison and even die for you! But he had not. Peter, the Rock, had failed. Jesus was right, he was only Simon after all and he would never be Peter on his own. Despite his protestations to the contrary he was a coward, not even able to affirm his love and friendship to Jesus to a servant girl. He was not the Rock and the amazing destiny Jesus had given him that day at Caesarea Philippi, telling him that Jesus' church would be founded on Peter and his faith, was never going to happen. They had arrested his Lord and he couldn't stop it. I think at that moment Peter knows the Sanhedrin are going to kill Jesus; they will find a way to execute him. He has lost his courage, his honor, his destiny and his Lord. Everything was lost. Peter flees out into the night and breaks down weeping. My guess is he had never felt lower in his life than at that moment. And Jesus is now utterly alone.

**22:63-65** - Jesus' Jewish guards ridicule him and strike him. They beat him and mistreat him, which should not have been allowed. It appears that this took place while he was in the dungeon of Caiaphas' house awaiting trial before the whole Sanhedrin. The guards blindfolded him then demanded that he tell them who hit him. They mocked his being a prophet. This was the beginning of Jesus' harsh treatment and sufferings.

By the time Jesus is led before the council he has been up all night, beaten about the face, and mocked mercilessly. *Isaiah 53* is beginning to be fulfilled in Jesus' sufferings.

**22:66-71** - At daybreak or dawn the Sanhedrin has hastily assembled at Caiaphas' house. This was not the normal place of meeting nor was it the normal time. This is obviously a special meeting called just for the purpose of trying and condemning Jesus. Many of the Sanhedrin's leaders had been plotting to get rid of Jesus for some time and my guess is this emergency plan had already been thought through and procedures were in place to call the meeting if they could succeed in arresting Jesus and holding him. Based on later tradition and what we learn from

Josephus about the procedures in the Sanhedrin Jesus' trial before them violated their own rules. It was an illegal trial and meeting by the Sanhedrin's own standards!

They lead Jesus before them and move right to the salient question: is Jesus the Messiah? They demand an answer from him. The curious thing is they have heard his claims already many times. Earlier in his ministry John records two times during the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles when Jesus claimed to be the Messiah right in the temple! Now however in their sham trial they want Jesus to declare it in his testimony so they can condemn him. Jesus refuses to directly tell them. Luke records his words, which must have come from Joseph, Nicodemus or someone else who was there. Jesus basically says you won't believe me no matter what I say, meaning you have rejected me as Messiah so why answer your question. Then he adds a Messianic statement using his favorite title, Son of Man, referring back to the picture of the Son of Man in *Daniel 7:13-14*. There the Son of Man is led to the throne of God and given an everlasting dominion, the Kingdom of God. Jesus doesn't directly say I am the Messiah, but then says you will see me as Messiah and Son of Man at the right hand of God. The questioners ask him directly if he is the Son of God, which would mean Jesus is God and he answers you are right in saying I am. In Greek the "I am" is *ego eimi*, I AM, the Greek words for Yahweh. Jesus claims to be God before the Sanhedrin!

The chief priests and other elders present shout out that they need no more witnesses because Jesus has condemned himself out of his own mouth! He is guilty of the worst sort of blasphemy by claiming to be God and Messiah!

Luke's version of the trial is somewhat different than the other gospels. Mark and Matthew add the testimony of false witnesses that were brought against Jesus, especially the charge that he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. Also they have Jesus being struck by some in the Sanhedrin and not the temple guards as Luke does. Luke's version is somewhat shorter and this may again be one of those places where Luke felt he didn't need to add all the details the other gospels did because Theophilus could read Mark or Matthew. The bottom line is Jesus is condemned and led off to Pilate because the Sanhedrin wants him executed and the Roman governor still held the authority to do that. Plus if the Romans execute Jesus the Sanhedrin can say they didn't do it the Romans did it.

### **Chapter 23:**

**23:1-5** - The Sanhedrin haul Jesus before Pilate. Their hatred for Jesus is so great that they are willing to forego their holiness rules in order to be in the presence of the governor, a Gentile. Luke says the whole council did this, presumably including Nicodemus and Joseph. The gospels don't tell us whether they tried to defend Jesus or not or how much they participated in the sham trial. It is even possible that they were not even there or were excluded because the leaders of the Sanhedrin knew they supported Jesus and they wanted no one to defend him. That however is pure speculation.

The Sanhedrin condemned Jesus on the basis of what they considered blasphemy; Jesus called himself the Son of God and claimed to be the Messiah. When they bring him before Pilate however they talk about subversion, refusal to pay taxes to Caesar, which was totally bogus, and claiming to be the Messiah a king, which was the one charge that was true. Pilate doesn't care about their religious controversies but the claim to be a king is serious according to Rome's interests. He asks Jesus in what appears to be a derisive way, are you king of the Jews? Jesus responds with a yes. At this point Jesus has been beaten, spit upon and harassed all night long and cannot have looked very presentable. I think Pilate is amused at the whole scene. This is the best the Jews can do? What a pitiful people! The Romans valued strength and gravitas, Jesus

appeared to have neither. I think it is for that reason that Pilate says he finds no grounds for the charges against Jesus. The elders keep pressing their case insisting that Jesus has stirred up the people, implying dangerous teaching and activities that will disturb the peace of the province if allowed to go on. They tell Pilate Jesus started in Galilee and now his movement has spread all the way to Jerusalem. They are trying to convince Pilate that Jesus is a dangerous man who promotes sedition against Rome because they want him executed. They are desperate to see him destroyed because they know they will not get another chance. If Jesus is set free his popularity with the people will prevent them from arresting him again, the Sanhedrin will lose face, events will spin out of control and then who knows what will happen!

**23:6-12** - Pilate hears Jesus is from Galilee and since Herod Antipas is in Jerusalem for Passover he decides to send him to Herod and pass Jesus off as a Galilean matter. This is a classic bureaucratic maneuver designed by a career civil servant to pass the buck! Pilate plays it well!

Herod had been trying to meet Jesus for some time because he is both fascinated with him and afraid of him just like he was with John the Baptist. Earlier statements in Luke's gospel indicate that Herod even entertained the idea that Jesus was John risen from the dead!

Herod questions Jesus for some time and Luke reports that he was hoping that Jesus would perform some miracle. But Jesus remains silent, just like *Isaiah 53* had said he would. The chief priests and other members of the Sanhedrin are all there accusing Jesus trying to get Herod to act and Jesus to respond. Herod does respond by allowing his soldiers to dress Jesus in an elegant robe, perhaps one of Herod's, and mocking him. Then he sends him back to Pilate. If Jesus is guilty of sedition as the Sanhedrin have said then Herod has done a very Roman thing by mocking him and tearing him down, showing how puny he is and how mighty Rome and Herod are. He has also done a very Jewish thing, by publicly shaming Jesus and causing him to lose great face, thus currying favor with the Sanhedrin. It was a very shrewd move on Herod's part with little risk because it was obvious at that point to Herod that Jesus posed little threat to him or to Rome.

When Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate dressed in the royal robe Pilate gets the joke and his attitude towards Herod softens. Luke comments that they had been enemies before, probably meaning their relations were not cordial and there was much tension between them. Now they became friends. Pilate may have seen the incident with Jesus as a bonus because his relationships with Herod and Galilee had improved. The day was turning out well. He did not know how much pressure the Sanhedrin was going to put upon him.

**23:13-25** - Jesus is sent back to Pilate by Herod, now dressed in the royal robe after having further been mocked and beaten by Herod's guards. Pilate calls the whole Sanhedrin together and tells them he finds no basis for the charges against Jesus of inciting a rebellion. He notes that Herod could find no reason to execute him either. He concludes by saying he has done nothing to deserve death so Pilate will punish him, meaning scourge him and then release him. The Sanhedrin know they have to bring more pressure to bear on Pilate to crucify Jesus or all their plans will unravel. It is interesting to note Pilate's prophetic words in v.15 that Jesus has done nothing to deserve death. He had not and never did deserve death because he was innocent. Even the Roman governor who did not believe in Jesus at all could see that if he ordered him crucified he was sending an innocent man to death.

The Sanhedrin now cry out for Pilate to release Barabbas to them and crucify Jesus. Matthew and Mark's gospels note that the Romans had a custom of releasing a condemned

prisoner in order to honor the Passover Feast and that is why the high priests and elders shout for Barabbas. Luke along with Mark note that Barabbas was in prison for murder and insurrection or rebellion. He did deserve death for fomenting a rebellion. The charges suggest that Barabbas was a Zealot revolutionary who had been captured by the Romans. In our day he would have been considered a terrorist.

Barabbas means son of the father, bar abbas. The Sanhedrin shout for the false son of the father, a man of violence, terror and murder. They scream for Pilate to kill Jesus the true Son of God whom Pilate himself has said does not deserve death. Jesus is their Messiah and Prince of Peace but they are so far from God and committed to keeping their own power that they reject him in favor of a murderer and false son.

Pilate keeps trying to convince the crowd led by the Sanhedrin to let him release Jesus. They keep shouting crucify him, crucify him! Pilate for the third time tries to reason with the crowd whipped into a frenzy of blood by the Jewish religious leaders. He finds no basis for the death penalty. He will release Jesus after having him scourged. The crowd shouts all the louder to have him crucified. Pilate is kowtowed by a Jewish mob and finally relents, releasing Barabbas the murderer and condemning Jesus the innocent man to the cross.

Luke shows Pilate being brow-beaten into crucifying Jesus, wanting to please the priests and Sanhedrin to keep the peace. He seems wanting to acquit Jesus, finding him innocent, but finally caving in. There is no mocking of the Jews here, no first scourging Jesus, no "friend of Caesar" accusations as in the other gospel accounts. It's as if he did his best but failed; as if Pilate is the victim of circumstances and it is the Jews who force his hand and demand Jesus' execution. Remember Luke is writing to a Roman official, Theophilus. That might be the reason he paints Pilate and his actions in the best possible light. In the end however, it is Pilate who bears responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus because only he had the authority to order it done. Underneath Luke's account however stands God. This is the Father's will and events will ultimately play out according to his divine plan. Jesus was innocent of any crime at all let alone a crime deserving death. He had to be because he was the innocent, spotless Lamb of God who would by his death take away the sins of the world.

**23:26-31** - The soldiers lead Jesus away to Golgotha. Luke says Pilate surrendered Jesus to the Sanhedrin's will but it was the Roman soldiers who crucified him. On the way from the Fortress Antonia on the northern end of the Temple Mount to Golgotha, the site of execution outside the city walls, the soldiers press Simon of Cyrene into service. They make him carry Jesus' cross because by this time Jesus has lost so much blood from the scourging and mocking and crown of thorns on his head that he is too weak to carry his cross. It was probably the cross beam and not the entire cross. The vertical piece was probably already in place. That would have been standard Roman procedure. Mark notes that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Rufus is greeted by Paul in *Romans 16*. It is likely it is the same Rufus and Simon's experience of carrying Jesus' cross led to his conversion and that of his family.

A large group of people follow the procession. This was a mixed crowd. Some would have come to jeer and mock Jesus or to gloat over his death, including the chief priests. Luke mentions many women were in the crowd mourning and wailing. Jesus turns to them and tells them do not weep. He warns them of the destruction that is coming, giving a prophecy of 70 again. He says blessed are those who never have children because of the destruction that is to come. Then he quotes from *Hosea 10* and a passage of judgment on Israel's sin. Jesus' prophecy once more lends credibility to the idea that the Roman destruction of the temple in 70 and the

smashing of the Jewish Revolt was a judgment on an unfaithful Israel who had rejected their Messiah. Going to his death Jesus speaks of this and implies if the Romans are doing this in peaceful times what will they do in a time of war and revolt?

Jesus shows his concern for the women following him and weeping. He tells them don't weep for me; weep for yourselves and your children because they are the ones who will suffer. Jesus is going to die for all of us and his death will purchase our salvation. The death of thousands of Jewish children during the Jewish war will be senseless and mothers will grieve because their sons and daughters are no more. In the end it is only Jesus who can save the Jewish people not their soldiers, or high priests or even the temple.

**23:32-34** - Two other men are led out to be crucified along with Jesus. Matthew identifies them as robbers. The word Luke uses simply means a bad person, someone who does bad things, which can describe all sorts of criminal behavior.

They come to the Place of the Skull, Golgotha in Aramaic, Calvary in Latin. It was a rocky outcrop or small hill just outside the main city walls. The Jews did not allow crucifixion inside the city. The Romans obliged their laws and crucified criminals outside the walls. Golgotha was just outside the city gates and would have been strategically placed to give maximum impact for people passing by. It publicly shamed the condemned man and it reminded all who came out and went in to the city the cost of opposing Rome or breaking the law. When the procession reached Golgotha, they crucified Jesus and the two thieves, one on his right and one on his left. Luke like all the gospel writers does not describe the details of how the soldiers crucified Jesus, where they placed the nails etc., because Theophilus and all his readers would have known the gory details all too well. Very few people in the Roman world had never seen a man die on a cross. Jesus in the resurrection appearances in John comments on the nail prints in his hands and feet. That tells us that the soldiers used the most painful method with Jesus, nails in the hands and feet, rather than simply nailing his feet and tying up his arms on the cross. The nails would have inflicted maximum pain and torture. That was their purpose.

Jesus after they have finished their gruesome task of nailing him to the cross speaks the first of the traditional seven last words of Christ, gathered from all the gospel accounts of the crucifixion. Here he asks his Father to forgive his executioners because they don't know what they are doing. Jesus' words are probably focused on the Roman soldiers doing their duty and not the Jewish religious leaders. He expressed his concern for the Gentile young men who nail him to the cross and asks his Father not to hold it against them. They do not know who he is or what he is doing. They will mock him and had mocked him but are doing it out of their Roman arrogance. The chief priests and Pharisees, and members of the Sanhedrin know who Jesus has claimed to be and have rejected him. Jesus is dying for them too, but he does not ask God to forgive them because they *KNOW* what they are doing.

Luke then adds that the soldiers divided up his clothes and cast lots for who would get them. This is fulfillment of the prophecy of *Psalms 22* which says that dogs have surrounded me and have pierced my hands and feet and they have divided up my clothes and cast lots for them. Much of that Psalm is a prophecy of the crucifixion. In fact Jesus quotes it in his great cry of grief in the other gospels.

**23:35-38** - The people who stood watching, including the rulers, meaning the Sanhedrin, hurl insults at him. They say he saved others let him save himself if he is the Christ of God. Here is Jesus' last temptation. Matthew and Mark report that the Jewish religious leaders demanded

Jesus come down from the cross if he was the Messiah and then they would believe him. They do not understand that Jesus has come to die and that he is dying for them and for all who insult him. If he does not, then there is no payment for human sin and the way will forever remain closed between God and humanity. His death is the only way.

The soldiers mock him too, thinking they are getting in on the fun. It is sadistic and cruel but that was crucifixion and it brought out the worst in people. It was not a humane way to execute criminals! The soldiers echo the religious leaders, if you are the king of the Jews save yourself. Their mocking was not only to Jesus it was also to the Sanhedrin. Here is the king of the Jews, dying on a cross! This is what we Romans think of you stupid Jews and your king!

To add insult and shame to Jesus' execution the notice of the charges is written above Jesus' head on the cross. Luke reports it read this is the king of the Jews. The last person to carry that title had been Herod the Great a friend and ally of Caesar. The notice shouts out if you are not Caesar's ally and claim to be a king this is what we do to you and what we will do to your country if you rebel against Rome! John's gospel says the notice was written in Aramaic, Greek and Latin so all who passed by could read it. The chief priests are insulted and want Pilate to change the notice to read he said he was the king of the Jews. Pilate refuses probably to rub their noses in it for pushing him to execute Jesus when he did not want to. Ultimately the notice is prophetic because it is true. Jesus was the king of the Jews. The Romans were carrying out the sentence but it was the Sanhedrin and the Jewish religious leaders who had rejected Jesus and demanded Pilate execute him. He had finally given in to their political pressure. Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, descended from David's line and the leaders of his own people rejected him and demanded his execution. They thought Jesus was a criminal and a blasphemer. 40 years later they would pay for their crimes against God and against his Christ and everything they valued, including the temple and their own lives would be taken from them. God's judgment would fall. Since his ancient people continued to reject their true Messiah Jesus and proclaimed Eliazer a false Messiah, God would punish them to bring them to repentance. His purpose would be the same as in Revelation when all the judgments come upon the people of the earth in order to bring them to repentance and accept Jesus as Lord. They do not repent, and so the judgments keep coming until Jesus returns and it is too late.

**23:39-43** - One of the criminals crucified with Jesus joins in the insults to him. He demands if Jesus is the Messiah to save himself and save the two criminals as well. The other criminal rebukes him. Don't you fear God since you too are sentenced to death? In other words what you are asking is incredibly selfish and is all because you are afraid to die and afraid what will happen next. The criminal understands he and his fellow thief are being punished justly for their crimes. He knows they deserve the death sentence. Then he says, but this man has done nothing wrong. He acknowledges Jesus' innocence, just as Pilate had tried to do.

He says to Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Or, remember me when you take up your reign. It is a reference to the Kingdom of God and Jesus' Messianic reign. Whether the man understands everything that is going on or not he recognizes Jesus as the Messiah. Perhaps he had heard Jesus somewhere in Jerusalem during holy week or perhaps he has simply watched him throughout the ordeal of his trial and crucifixion, having an immediate perspective that few others had. We don't know, but here dying on the cross he knows who Jesus is.

Jesus says to him, today you will be with me in paradise. Paradise would be Abraham's bosom that Jesus had referred to in the rich man and Lazarus. It was the heaven side of Sheol, and the resting place of the righteous, while Hades or Sheol itself was the prison for the wicked

awaiting the final judgment of God. As the apostles interpreted Jesus' teaching after the resurrection the whole concept of Sheol is abandoned and substituted simply with heaven. The idea of Paradise is caught up into the idea of heaven and included in it. Part of the reason is Jesus finishes his work on the cross and resurrection. There is no more need for an intermediate place before heaven. We are now in heaven with Jesus and the Father. We are personally present with our Lord after death. We are not yet resurrected, that awaits his second coming but our spirits are with the Lord and with those who know Jesus who have died before we have. What Jesus promises the thief on the cross is to be personally present with him after death in heaven. Jesus knew he was dying and he knew the thief was going to die as well. He recognizes that the thief acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah and accepts his rudimentary faith as adequate. There is no baptism, no formula here at all, but the simple acceptance of Jesus by grace of the thief's request. What was he thinking as Jesus spoke those words? What did his companion in crime on the other cross think? Jesus knows his hour is getting close and he has almost finished his suffering. Paradise awaits him and the resurrection and victory!

**23:44-49** - The sixth hour is noon and the ninth hour is 3pm. Darkness came over the land for three hours as Jesus hung dying on the cross. Darkness is spoken of often in the prophets as a sign of the Day of the Lord, the day of God's judgment. Even nature itself was declaring that God was judging human sin on the cross and dealing with it. It was the Day of the Lord in history all focused on Jesus.

Luke reports that the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Mark comments that it was torn from top to bottom. No human being could have torn that curtain because it was inches thick and made of heavy wool fabric. That is even more true if it was torn from top to bottom. The symbolism is striking. The curtain divided the holy place from the holy of holies and kept the Ark of the Covenant out of sight of even the priests. It symbolized the holiness of God and the impossibility of approaching the presence of God except for the high priest on the Day of Atonement. God is holy and cannot look at human sin. When Jesus died the way was opened for humans to approach God because sin has been paid for by God himself. God has provided the atonement sacrifice that satisfies his justice, righteousness and holiness. He has offered his one and only Son!

Luke gives us the third of Jesus' three last words and the final one, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." A few hours before Jesus had cried out using the words of *Psalms 22*, my God why have you forsaken me? It was the climax of sin being placed upon God's Son. That cry was a prayer of anguish. This is a cry of faith and victory. He is in fellowship with his Father and knows he is about to die. He commits his spirit to God as his body dies. That is a picture of what happens to us. This body of sin dies, but our spirits live in God's presence. We must wait for resurrection day. Jesus had to wait too, but only to the third day. In that sense everything that happened to Jesus in death will happen to us, but he has gone before us to blaze the trail back to God's presence. When Jesus cries out his prayer he dies.

The centurion who was probably in charge of the crucifixion detail exclaims after watching Jesus die on the cross, that this must have been a righteous man. It is a curious thing to say. The Roman soldiers had mocked Jesus and were making fun of him as king of the Jews. But more importantly here is the final witness by a Roman that Jesus was innocent because if he was guilty he would not have been righteous. In Mark the centurion says he must have been the Son of God. Luke wants to emphasize Jesus' innocence and has three witnesses to state it, Pilate, the

believing thief and the centurion. Testimony confirmed by three witnesses stood up in a Jewish trial. I am not certain how many witnesses were valid for a Roman trial.

Luke also reports to us that the people who had been watching Jesus' crucifixion went away moved, beating their breasts in grief and emotion. This included many who had opposed him. No one left the cross unmoved. His friends, including the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching it all happen. Luke hints that at least some of the disciples were watching Jesus die from a distance. We know from John's gospel that John was at the cross and was charged with taking care of Mary.

**23:50-56** - Jesus is dead and it is getting late on Friday nearing sundown of the Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin and a Pharisee, but also a good man and a secret disciple of Jesus now does something very public. He goes to Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus. He takes down the body, wraps it in a linen cloth and places it in a new tomb cut in the rock near Golgotha. No one had yet been laid in this tomb. Joseph is apparently wealthy enough to have a tomb and as a member of the Sanhedrin had wealth and influence. Whether he knew it or not his actions fulfill *Isaiah 53* that say God's Servant will be laid in a rich man's tomb.

The women who had followed him from Galilee and who had provided for his needs followed Joseph and whoever else was helping him to the tomb and saw how Jesus' body was laid in the tomb. They went home and began to prepare spices and perfumes to anoint the body which was Jewish custom but did not go back to the tomb as it was the Sabbath. They rested according to the commandment. Luke is setting up Jesus' resurrection on the third day: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Presumably the women start their preparations before sunset on Friday night and finish them after sunset Saturday, planning on going to the tomb early on Sunday morning to anoint the body and prepare a proper burial for their Lord and friend. Little do they know that they will never get the chance. For them Jesus is dead and with him all their hopes that he was the Messiah. It is clear from the gospel accounts that though Jesus had prophesied his resurrection none of the disciples were predisposed to believe it or watch for it. The cross had shattered any memory of Jesus' sayings and any faith that they were true. On that Friday night all they felt was grief, defeat and disappointment. All was lost.

## **Chapter 24:**

**24:1-8** - Very early on Sunday morning, the first day of the Jewish week, the women who had seen Joseph and Nicodemus lay Jesus' body in the tomb went to the tomb to anoint the body and finish their duties to Jesus' body and the burial of their friend. Sunday was a work day for the Jews and so it was natural after the Sabbath was finished for the women to go to the tomb. They would not have gone Saturday night even though the Sabbath was over because they needed time to prepare the spices. Mark's gospel reports that the women had to buy the spices, which points to shopping for them Saturday night. John's gospel says that Joseph and Nicodemus had brought 75 pounds worth of myrrh and aloes, expensive spices and an extravagant amount used for the burial of a king. Yet the women brought spices too. Perhaps they came to finish Joseph and Nicodemus' work or more likely they wanted to contribute their own offering to Jesus' burial and so they brought the spices they had prepared for Jesus' body. They were the ones who had cared for him and taken care of his needs all throughout his Galilean ministry. Why would we expect it to be any different at his death?

When they arrived at the tomb however they found the large stone that sealed the tomb already rolled away from the entrance. When they went in they did not see Jesus' body. Luke says they were wondering about this. John's gospel says Mary Magdalene thought someone had stolen the body. The women at the tomb did not remember Jesus' prophecy of his resurrection. They have to be reminded by the angels. This shows that the resurrection was a shock and a surprise to them all. They were not expecting Jesus to rise again, especially after having witnessed his crucifixion!

While they are wondering about where Jesus' body has been taken and what is going on two men in bright clothing that gleamed like lightning stand beside them. These are angels but Luke describes them as men. Mark says there was a young man at the tomb that spoke to them. Matthew also says there was one angel. John does not mention any angels at the empty tomb. Luke is the only gospel writer who also includes the angel's question to the women, why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he is risen. The women are afraid and bow down before the angels. They reassure them and remind them how Jesus had told them all of this when he was with them in Galilee. They reiterate his prophecy that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again. When they remind the women of Jesus' words they finally remember them and it all clicks into place.

In v.7 the verb be raised again is in the passive voice. Jesus didn't simply wake up or raise himself. God did it to him. Paul states in *Romans 1:4* that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus and in *Romans 4* that God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus doesn't do this to himself just like we do not baptize ourselves. It is done to us.

**24:9-12** - The women come back from the tomb and tell the disciples and everyone else what they have seen and heard. The "everyone else" could be many people. It could be Mary and some of Jesus' family. It could be some of the other disciples, representatives of the 70 Jesus had sent out earlier. It could also be the other women who followed Jesus who did not go to the tomb early that morning. We know it was a mixed group of people who were with Jesus even at the end. The Eleven (the Twelve) are Jesus' handpicked apostles. That Sunday morning they were probably wondering what they had been chosen for and what they should do now.

Luke reports that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them told this to the apostles. The "others with them" accounts for the discrepancy in some of the names of the women who went to the tomb. Luke singles out these three. Mary Magdalene is mentioned in all four gospels as being present at the tomb Easter morning. Joanna is mentioned in *8:1-3* as the wife of Cuza the manager or steward of Herod Antipas' household and one of the women who helped provide for Jesus and his disciples' needs. Mary the mother of James could be the mother of James and John or James the Son of Alphaeus, another of Jesus' disciples. It is probably not Mary, Jesus' mother although that possibility cannot be ruled out. However, there is not even an ancient Catholic or Orthodox tradition that puts Mary at the tomb on Easter morning so I think it highly unlikely. Plus Luke never hesitates to name Mary Jesus' mother, so why change now? The more likely candidate is James and John's mother who came to Jesus in *Mark 10*, asking for positions of power for her sons when Jesus came to his Messianic throne.

Why mention the women? Luke has a special focus on the role of women in Jesus' ministry and he wants to give them credit for being the first witnesses to the resurrection, or at least the empty tomb. The apostles and all the others with them did not believe the women's testimony, because it seemed to them as nonsense. People don't rise from the dead on their own!

Luke does two things with that statement. First he shows how the disciples were not looking for signs of Jesus rising. Instead they were crushed by his crucifixion. Second, it is a great testimony for the authenticity of Luke's account because a woman's word was not admissible in court as eye witness testimony. It was thought women could not be trusted to get the story right. If Luke was fabricating his gospel it is highly unlikely that he would have chosen the first witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus to be women. He is once again trying to show Theophilus of the trustworthiness of his account.

Peter hears their testimony and runs to the tomb to check out the story. He bends down to look into the tomb and he sees the strips of linen cloth lying by themselves but he does not see Jesus' body or Jesus. John's gospel says that Peter and John ran to the tomb that morning. Peter sees the empty tomb but he goes back to the upper room wondering what it all means. He does not yet understand what has occurred. Sometime later that day Jesus appears to Peter, the first of all of the apostles to see Jesus risen. The disciples tell the Emmaus disciples that Jesus has appeared to Simon in *24:34* when they return from Emmaus with their story of seeing the risen Jesus.

*Note:* the guides at the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem go to great lengths to try and tie their tomb to the gospel accounts and say their site fits everything the gospels tell us about the tomb. But this little detail in Luke's account, that Peter had to bend down to see into to the tomb works against the Garden Tomb as Jesus' burial site. One has to bend down to enter the tomb because the top of the door is low. But if there is no stone in the way you do not have to bend down to see in. You look directly at where Jesus' body is said to have rested. The guides are so enthusiastic in trying to convince you of their site as the right site and that it dovetails with the details of the gospels yet in the case of *Luke 24:12* it does not.

**24:13-16** - Two disciples, one named Cleopas, are walking to Emmaus that Sunday, a village about 7 miles from Jerusalem. The village cannot be placed with any certainty. The most likely possibilities are too far away for Luke's description. Luke also does not give any reason for why Cleopas and his companion were leaving Jerusalem and walking to Emmaus on that Sunday. The time is uncertain, but it must have been the middle of the day because evening is approaching by the time the men reach the village. The two men are part of the larger circle of the disciples, perhaps part of the 70 Jesus had sent out ahead of him in mission. They are not of the Eleven but were probably part of the 120 who were in the Upper Room at Pentecost. Luke's source for this incident is probably Cleopas or his companion.

They are talking as they journey on the road about all the events surrounding Jesus and his death. They had already heard the reports of the women that morning, which also lends credibility to their journey taking place Easter afternoon. As they are talking Jesus himself joins them on the road. The two Greek infinitives used to describe their conversation imply more than just talking; they were examining what had taken place, questioning and debating together what it all meant. Jesus joins them as they walk but Luke says they were kept from recognizing him. The verb literally means to hold something or have power over it. In other words Jesus had the power to keep them from perceiving who he was. He shielded his identity from them. Luke implies this was a direct action by Jesus on their minds and not some sort of disguise by Jesus or an ability to alter his appearance. Jesus clouds their perception of him in order to shield his identity for the time being. He is going to test them. As far as we know, Jesus still looks like Jesus. This almost sounds like some Jedi mind trick from Star Wars!

**24:17-19** - Jesus joins their conversation and plays dumb. What are you all talking about? Cleopas answers with his own question, as if it should have been obvious to Jesus what they were talking about! Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and don't know what has been happening? Cleopas' question implies they are still close to Jerusalem. This also fits the rest of the story since Jesus has to have at least several hours to teach them all the Scriptures concerning himself along the road. Perhaps they were still within sight of the city. It is unclear. Once again Jesus plays dumb and it's almost humorous; what things? Their attitude is downcast, depressed, sorrowful and confused. Their answer shows their hopes have been dashed and they too were not predisposed to believe Jesus was going to rise from the dead. Even though Jesus had told them all he was going to be raised, the disciples were not looking for it. The resurrection came as a surprise; an interruption; news that was too good to be true!

**24:19-24** - Cleopas now answers Jesus' question. They have been talking about Jesus of Nazareth, whom he names a prophet who had great power from God. The chief priests and the Sanhedrin handed him over to be crucified. Notice the way Cleopas implicates the Jewish rulers and not the Romans. Pilate crucified Jesus and Cleopas does not say the chief priests did it but the implication is they bear the chief blame for Jesus' death and not the Roman authorities. Was Luke shaping Cleopas' testimony here to shield Roman officials from blame for Jesus' death? Is he trying to soften Pilate's responsibility to shield Theophilus? Or is that me just reading into the text imagined motives from Luke?

Cleopas goes on and states that "we", probably meaning all Jesus' followers, had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel, meaning they had hoped he was more than a prophet, but was the Messiah himself! Cleopas then explains it is the third day since all of this has taken place, namely Jesus' crucifixion. It is obvious from what he says that their hopes about Jesus being the Messiah have been completely smashed. He is dead; therefore he cannot be the Christ! He then describes the testimony of the women who found the tomb empty that morning but did not find his body. Cleopas corroborates John and Luke's descriptions of Peter and John going to the tomb to check out the women's story, finding the tomb empty but the body of Jesus gone. It is clear from Cleopas' description of the events surrounding Jesus' death and the testimony of the women and their vision of angels and Peter and John's running to the tomb, that the empty tomb did not convince Jesus' followers of his resurrection it only confused them. Even with the evidence before them that something extraordinary had happened they were still not connecting the dots between the events of early Easter morning and Jesus' prophecies of his death and resurrection. What proved to them Jesus was alive was not the empty tomb but the appearances to them of the risen Christ!

**24:25-27** - Jesus now responds in a way that I don't think they anticipated at all! He scolds them not for their lack of faith in the evidence of the empty tomb or doubting the women's story. He scolds them for not believing the Scriptures and what was written in them concerning the Messiah. Jesus was constantly referring back to the Scriptures concerning himself. He had prophesied what would happen and said it was all written beforehand and must all be fulfilled. Now he tells them again that it was written that the Messiah had to suffer and then enter his glory. He had to die before he could be resurrected and victorious! Then Jesus gives the greatest Bible study ever given. He starts with Moses and goes through all the prophets showing them how the Scriptures had pointed to all these things and had to be fulfilled. He shows them in the Old Testament all the Scriptures that point to Jesus and his mission. His teaching the two

disciples here on the Emmaus Road and later during his forty days with the Eleven and all the disciples before the resurrection formed the basis for the preaching of the apostles after Pentecost and their use of the Scriptures to prove Jesus was the Christ.

Even so, one only comes to Christ by faith. Jews today who know the Scriptures and all the prophecies of the Messiah, can be shown the same passages that Jesus taught Cleopas and his companion that Easter afternoon on the Emmaus Road and they will still not believe, because their hearts are closed to God's Word and the testimony about Jesus. It still takes faith and not logic to come to Christ. Reason and logic play a role but faith is a matter of the surrender of one's self and will to Jesus. Apologetics are crucial, they are necessary but they are not sufficient. The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord can only be received by faith.

It also shows that it takes a personal encounter with Jesus to produce faith. They knew the evidence of the empty tomb and Peter and John's testimony that the body of the Lord Jesus was gone but that did not convince them. They had heard Jesus teach them all the Scriptures that pointed to him but that did not convince them. They needed Jesus to reveal himself to them personally which only came when he broke bread with them. The gospel carries the power today for Jesus to reveal himself to us, but that is the only necessary and sufficient thing that will produce faith in us. Nothing else will suffice!

**24:28-29** - The three men are approaching Emmaus and it is getting late. Jesus acts like he is going farther and they beg him to stay with them. It was dark and dangerous on the road after sundown and Cleopas and his friend are concerned about Jesus traveling further so they implore him to accept their hospitality. Jesus finally relents.

**24:30-32** - Jesus reclines at table with them for a meal. In good Middle Eastern fashion they offer him, their guest, the opportunity to bless the bread to begin the meal. Jesus takes the bread as he had done so many times with them, gives thanks for it, breaks it and hands it to them. These are the very actions he had done at the Passover meal with them the previous Thursday night and had changed the words, giving them the Lord's Supper. It is at this moment that Jesus withdraws the veil he has put over their minds and their eyes are opened so that they can now recognize him. As soon as they do he disappears from their sight!

Jesus' resurrection body was similar yet different from ours. He could hide his identity or reveal his identity at will. This implies a power of the mind and perception that we do not have. Luke never even hints that this was some sort of disguise. His implication was that Jesus had direct power to control the perception of the people around him in order to conceal his real identity. Jesus looked real, he had a physical presence, and thus he could pick up the bread, break it and hand it to them. He was not an apparition without physical abilities. He was not a ghost. He could vanish from their sight at will and remove himself from a room or location and then appear at a different one seemingly at will. He could speak and carry on a conversation as well just as he always had and Luke does not even hint that Cleopas and his friend thought Jesus sounded weird or different. He sounded like he always sounded. Finally Jesus remembered everything that had happened to him. There were no gaps in his memory as if his resurrection removed his memory and perception of the events of his earthly life. He recalled them all.

When Jesus disappears the two disciples exclaim to each other that they knew something was going on when Jesus had been teaching them from the Scriptures. They simply didn't understand how it all related and they did not connect the dots that it was Jesus who was speaking to them. Now they are convinced he is risen. It was his appearance to them and

revealing himself to them in the breaking of the bread that convinced them. That experience was so powerful and cemented the fact of Jesus' ongoing fellowship with them that the "breaking of the bread" becomes another name for the Lord's Supper and communion. Luke uses it that way at the end of *Acts 2* to describe the activity of the early church.

**24:33-35** - As soon as Jesus disappears they get up and run back to Jerusalem even though it is now evening. Their concern for safety on the roads is overridden by their joy and amazement at knowing the Lord Jesus is alive! They find the Eleven and the rest of the disciples gathered together, probably in the Upper Room. Before they can even get their story out the people there exclaim that it's all true, the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon, meaning Peter. Paul affirms this in *1 Corinthians 15*, that the first of the apostles to see Jesus risen was Peter. We do not have that appearance in the gospel accounts and it is possible that if the ending to Mark's gospel has been lost he intended to include it as the close to his gospel but we do not know.

The two friends then tell the assembled disciples, both men and women, what had happened on the road and how Jesus had revealed himself to them in the breaking of the bread.

A picture of Easter and the faith of the disciples in the risen Jesus begins to emerge from Luke's account, coupled with the other gospels. At the beginning of the morning when the women went to the tomb they did not believe. The empty tomb did not convince them that Jesus was risen. It was only after he appeared to Peter and the Emmaus' disciples, along with Mary Magdalene, that the disciples began to understand the incredible truth. Even then it took Thomas another week before he would believe. The facts are it was the appearance of the risen Christ that convinced them. The empty tomb did not, it only confused them. Physical evidence is not enough for faith. Even now it takes a personal encounter with the risen Jesus to produce faith in us. We experience that through the preaching of the gospel, through events, and through the Lord's Table. The Holy Spirit takes all of these things and uses them to convince us that Jesus is alive so that believing in him we might be forgiven and saved!

**24:36-42** - While the Emmaus disciples are relating their story about the Lord's appearance to them and how he disappeared at the breaking of the bread, Jesus himself suddenly stands among them and says, peace be with you. Shalom! They are startled and frightened thinking they are seeing a ghost, an apparition. Jesus responds immediately to allay their fears. He questions them as to why they are troubled and doubts arise within their minds. As a follow up he asks them to examine his hands and feet. It is I myself he tells them. He invites them to touch his hands and feet and reminds them that a ghost does not have flesh and bone as he does. While they are still too overwhelmed to believe it he asks if they have anything to eat. They give him some fish and he eats it in front of them. This scene is almost comical in nature You can picture the disciples watching Jesus eat the fish to see if the fish disappears or if it falls to the floor uneaten as it would if Jesus were simply an apparition or a figment of their imaginations. Even now they are still skeptical of his resurrection. They are surprised and shocked by it. They have no frame of reference within which to put it. All of the resurrection miracles that Jesus did during his ministry are simply restoring life to someone. Jesus is alive but he is different! Something more is going on here that the disciples have not as yet understood. They do not know that Jesus now belongs body and spirit to the Age to Come! He is the first fruits of the great resurrection at the last day! He is the example of what we will all be like.

One wonders whether Peter, Mary Magdalene and Cleopas and his friend had a different reaction to Jesus popping into the Upper Room Easter night. They had already seen him, while

the other apostles and disciples had not. Undoubtedly they too were surprised by his sudden appearance but I don't think they still thought of him as a ghost. I think the four of them were grinning ear to ear with an "I told you so" look on their faces, overjoyed to see the Lord again.

Jesus invites them to touch him and see if he is real. He eats some fish in their presence to prove he is not a ghost. He says he has flesh and bones as they do yet he is transformed because he simply appears in their presence. He can move at will from place to place without taking time to physically journey there. John's gospel reports that the doors to the Upper Room where they were meeting were locked and yet Jesus doesn't knock or enter through the door; he simply appears inside a locked room! He shows them his hands and feet, meaning he still carries the scars of his crucifixion like a badge of honor. The scars of his scourging are gone, but the scars of his sacrifice for us he will always bear to confirm that the crucified one is risen!

This incident raises some interesting questions. Jesus eats in front of them and obviously has a physical presence. Does he need to eat, or does the action of eating simply give him pleasure and fellowship with the disciples? He is now immortal and my guess is his former physical bodily functions are no longer necessary. He does not require food to live nor sleep to recuperate energy and strength. His existence is defined by immortality as God's is. He eats to enjoy the food and to prove to the disciples that he is in fact real. But the fish didn't digest and go through his digestive track to be consumed and then eliminated as our bodies would do. It is simply consumed and disappears because of the immortal energy Jesus' body possessed. He has a corporeal presence that can be touched and yet he can appear and disappear at will, including enter a room that is locked without coming through the door. From a scientific standpoint there is no way to explain how his body worked. He is no longer bound by time and space or the laws of this physical universe. Perhaps Jesus' body is now able to access multiple dimensions at the same time enabling him to come and go at will. This all sounds like something out of Star Trek and is total speculation but it is fun!

The other more profound issue that Jesus' resurrected body raises is evidence of his crucifixion. There is no hint here that Jesus looked disfigured, with scars on his head from the crown of thorns or bruising around his face from the beating he took from the guards or scars or cuts from his scourging. Yet he shows them the marks of the nails in his hands and feet and they are still visible! The implication is in our resurrected state all evidence of physical trauma will be erased. We will be perfect in body and spirit. If our physical bodies died in a terrible accident or a war or wasted away from cancer, our resurrected bodies will not show that. All effects of sin, death and its consequences, the work of Satan in the world, will be erased. Jesus alone will bear the marks of his death in heaven for all eternity as a testimony of the sacrifice of the Son of God for us. Just as God the Father will take all our grief and bear it for eternity so God the Son will always display the marks of the awful cost of human sin and the overwhelming love of God which paid the price for us.

**24:44-49** - Jesus then reminds them that while he was with them he taught them that everything written in the Scriptures about him must be fulfilled. He says everything written in the Law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms. Those are the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures, what we know as the Old Testament. Jesus is saying it all points to him. This is exactly the same lesson that Jesus was teaching Cleopas and his friend on the Road to Emmaus. The Hebrew Scriptures point to Jesus, which is a fundamental understanding of the Christian faith. Jesus is the prophesied Messiah of Israel, the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah who will bear the sins of humanity and the heavenly Son of Man who will rule the universe in the Kingdom of God and

the Age to Come. There is an already and not yet component to this fulfillment. Much has been fulfilled, much yet remains to come to fulfillment. The resurrection is the fulcrum, proving that what remains will come to pass because so much that speaks of Jesus has already been confirmed. Jesus' resurrection is God's seal proving his Messiahship. That means his Second Coming that has yet to occur will come to pass so that everything written about him will be fulfilled. As Paul says, all the promises of God find their yes in Jesus Christ!

Jesus then opens their minds to understand the Scriptures, teaching them like he taught the Emmaus disciples. The Holy Spirit now teaches us and reminds us of everything Jesus said and did. It took Jesus' help for the disciples to understand how he fulfills Scripture and it takes the Spirit's help for us to understand as well. Even though when you do see how Jesus fulfills the prophecies it is plain yet a non-believer simply does not see it as obvious. When and if they begin to see and understand it is a sign of the Spirit's work in their lives and that the Lord Jesus is seeking them.

Jesus summarizes what the Scriptures teach about him; the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. Everything that had happened had occurred just as it had been written about him! The immediate result is that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations beginning in Jerusalem. The already part of God's plan and Kingdom is the way is now clear for people to come to God and be reconciled to him through Jesus Christ. Forgiveness of sins is offered to all who will come. God's ultimate sacrifice has been given in Jesus and the offer is to all nations not just the Jews. But that offer will be first proclaimed and announced in Jerusalem to the Jews because Jesus is first the Messiah of Israel.

The apostles and disciples are Jesus' witnesses of all these things. He then tells them that he is going to send them what the Father has promised, namely the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit living in all of them. They are to stay in the city until they have been clothed with power from on high just as Jesus was at his baptism. They are to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. This is the next step in the outworking of God's salvation plan and is absolutely necessary in order for it to be carried out. The Holy Spirit will be the ultimate evidence of already and not yet and a further sign that the crucified-risen one is the Messiah promised by the prophets of Israel!

Luke makes it seem as if the disciples stayed in Jerusalem the entire 40 days before the ascension. We know there were appearances in Galilee and Jesus had told them to go there and they would see him. There must have been travel back and forth between Jerusalem and home in Galilee. Luke's emphasis is setting up the coming of the Holy Spirit in *Acts 2*.

**24:50-52** - Luke closes his gospel with a short description of the ascension. He says Jesus and the disciples went out to the vicinity of Bethany, on the backside of the Mt. of Olives. *Acts 1* specifically says it was the Mt. of Olives. There he lifts up his hands and blesses them. This was a priestly action because Jesus is now the great high priest in the order of Melchizedek according to *Psalms 110*. While he was blessing them Luke says he was taken up into heaven, leaving them. They returned to Jerusalem and were continually in the temple praising God. *Acts 1* reports that they gathered in the Upper Room to pray and wait for Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit. After Pentecost they were in the temple day by day praising God. Luke condenses and summarizes his accounts here setting up Volume 2 for Theophilus. The point is they worshipped Jesus as God and they were no longer in hiding. They publicly were proclaiming and living the fact that Jesus was the Messiah!

Why was the ascension necessary? Jesus now belonged body and spirit to the Age to Come. He did not belong to this earth any longer. His existence was not bound to this present age

and the world of sin. He belonged to the future of God that he would send. Plus Jesus had told his disciples that if he returned to heaven it would be to their advantage because now he could send the Spirit in fulfillment of the Messianic Age and he would dwell with all of them no matter where they went. Jesus would no longer be limited, even as the resurrected Jesus, to one place and time. Wherever his people went all over the world bearing witness to him there he would be in the person and presence of the Holy Spirit. The ascension guarantees the coming of the Spirit and marks Jesus taking up his Messianic authority in heaven. The already is complete. Now we wait for the not yet. The age of the church is about to begin!

*Final Note:* Luke's gospel is a condensed account for Theophilus' sake and our sakes of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection. Think of how much he includes but also how much he leaves out. If Jesus' ministry is around three years that means it was 1095 days or close to 1100 days long. Yet in Luke's gospel he only reports some 120 incidents and teachings during Jesus' life and 45 incidents or teachings during Holy Week. That is a total of 165 different teachings and events in Jesus' life out of a possible 1100 days. Plus many of these things happened during the same day. That is only a maximum of 15% of the total days of Jesus' ministry. Even if only one teaching or event happened a day one can see there are so many things Luke and the other gospel writers leave out. These are simply the highlights. The gospels give us a truncated view of Jesus' life and make it sound as if everywhere he went he was doing miracles every day. That is simply not the case. There must have been months when he was simply traveling from place to place, teaching and sometime healing and casting out demons. What we have, just as in the *Book of Acts* is only the highlights, the incidents that make the 6 o'clock news that Luke and the other gospel writers believed were necessary for us to believe that Jesus was the Christ and in believing finding the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. As John says at the end of his gospel, these things are written that we might believe in the Son of God and believing have life in his name. He also comments that if everything Jesus did and said were written down the world would not have enough space to contain all the books that would be written. That is a perspective that we need to have, which also helps explain the differences in the gospels, especially John and the Synoptics. The Holy Spirit caused the writers of the gospels to write down the necessary and sufficient stories of Jesus for our salvation. Plus books were expensive and cumbersome to copy and distribute. It would have been almost unthinkable for someone in the ancient Roman world to write a 3000 page history of Jesus like Shelby Foote did of the Civil War. We forget the context within which the gospels were written and judge them by our modern historical standards rather than taking them for what they are, summaries of Jesus' life and ministry and narratives of his Passion and resurrection so that we might believe the gospel and be saved!