Lessons on Luke

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Dedication

To our friends from the Becoming Closer class, for their constant encouragement and support.

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Why I Believe - Luke 1

It is fashionable in our day to regard the Bible as being a quaint collection of fairy tales – from which you can tell that the mavens of fashion have never read it. But many Christians are ignorant of the solid factual foundation of the Scripture. To this point we must now attend.

Luke

Luke lays out the purpose of his writing quite concisely:

> Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.
> (Luke 1:1-4 NASB)

There is some debate about who "Theophilus" might be; some say it is a general title of those who love God, for that is what it means in the Greek. Others, citing the title "most excellent" as being commonly used of the nobility of the time, think this is written to a particular individual. Who can say?

Luke, the writer

We do know something about Luke himself.

- He is definitely not a Jew, but one raised in the Greek culture of that time and place. Church history places him in Syrian Antioch, where the disciples were first called Christians. He has a complete grasp of Greek, but is also well versed (or researched) in Hebrew custom.
- He is certainly a doctor of the time. Several of the expressions are those which are found in the medical literature of the time, and no where else.
- He is the companion of Paul, and he is the writer of Acts of the Apostles. Only fitfully has this been challenged; the evidence is overwhelming, both internal and external.

The character of this Gospel

It is overwhelmingly clear that this is the authentic Gospel.

- The internal evidence – such things as the style of the Greek, the names and places mentioned (especially in Acts) and the references to Luke by Paul make it clear that this book is just what it appears to be.
- There is also the external evidence. The writers of the early church, particularly Eusebius, Iraneus and Origen , all testify to the writer being who he claimed to be, in the method he claimed.
- Particularly with regard to Acts, the archeological evidence is very firm. Luke describes places with names of local rulers who have been confirmed by the archeologists. (Kindly remember: "there is no evidence" in archeology may mean simply that we haven't dug it up yet.)

The integrity of the work has been challenged only by those intent on denying the doctrine of the Incarnation. Virtually all scholars of the Scripture accept Luke as being not only accurate, but also as being the one which provides the correct chronology. Since Luke is not an eyewitness of the Resurrection, he has been obliged to carefully deal with conflicting memories.

Purpose of the work

Luke did not do this out of an amiable thought and too much spare time. His purposes are clear.

- First, to solidly ground the faith as taught in the facts as they happened.
- Next, to be the clear Gospel to the Gentiles – those with no experience in Judaism.

This is extremely important. These are not the personal recollections of John; nor the notes from Peter's preaching (Mark), nor even the shorthand taken at the time by Matthew. This is a scholarly work in the best academic tradition of the time.

Why is this important? Because he begins his account with the most important miracle ever to impact human history: the Incarnation of the Word of God. This is such an important – and unique – fact that it is going to be met with doubt. Indeed, Joseph and Zacharias both have their doubts – it is only in the humility and obedience of Mary and Elizabeth that we see the faith in action. Doubt comes from the pride of the strong minded; the cheerful humility of the obedient is shown to triumph over it.

God provokes poetry

No one, to my knowledge, has ever been lukewarm when encountering the Almighty – even in the form of one of his messengers (angels). Zacharias, like Gideon of old, doubted.

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. Now it happened *that* while he was performing his priestly service before God in the *appointed* order of his division, according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. Zacharias was troubled when he saw *the angel,* and fear gripped him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. "It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this *for certain?* For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time." The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home. After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked *with favor* upon *me,* to take away my disgrace among men."
(Luke 1:5-25 NASB)

We might wonder why Zacharias was hit with a gag order. But consider what God would have expected of him: he is a priest, one knowledgeable in the Law and the Prophets. He has been selected to serve in the inner sanctum of the Temple. All the people would look up to him as an example. He has the greater knowledge and position, and therefore the greater responsibility.

His failure, for such it is, shows us the difficulty of the learned and intellectual. He knows so much – including all the reasons why it can't happen. Of course, he also has the example of Abraham and Sarah – which he will remember in due course. He has been faithful in little things; but his doubt rises up at the moment of the big thing. It is proof once again: if you would follow the Lord, obedience must triumph over doubt.

Note, however, that his failing does not stop God's purpose. Gabriel does not set out to find somebody better at this. He simply tells him of the discipline God will impose – and the fact that the purpose of God cannot be thwarted by our failures.

Blessed

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord *is* with you." But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. "And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. "For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! "And how has it *happened* to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. "And blessed *is* she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."
(Luke 1:26-45 NASB)

We will, for the sake of brevity, skip over the meeting of Gabriel and Mary. Less known, but still important, is the reaction of Elizabeth. The meeting with God inspires poetry in some, and here it begins. May I point out to you the three "blesseds" she shows us?

- First, blessed is Mary, the mother of our Lord. We must not let Roman Catholic excess conceal the fact that this one woman, above all other women of all time, was blessed by God. She had the

unique privilege of bearing the one man who is the Son of God.[1] If you would know why she was chosen, the words "humility" and "obedience" should come to mind.

- Next, blessed is the Christ child to come. In all generations since we have cried, "Bless the Lord!" Here is the first such cry.
- Finally, as a lesson to us, blessed is "she who believed." God told her the impossible was about to happen. She did not doubt (though she did question). Like Abraham, she had faith – and it was imputed as righteousness.

Magnificat

The clearest picture of Mary's thinking is in what is called the Magnificat[2], her praise to God.

And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. "For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM. "He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered *those who were* proud in the thoughts of their heart. "He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. "HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed. "He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever." And Mary stayed with her about three months, and *then* returned to her home. (Luke 1:46-56 NASB)

Mary exalts the Lord; she does not proclaim how wonderful and deserving she must be to have achieved all this. In fact, she proclaims quite the opposite.

- Her first praise concerns the fact that God has exalted her – by granting her the unique privilege of being the mother of Jesus, the Christ. There is no thought of, "I'm so humble, that's why I'm worthy." You see no sign of Mary thinking of herself except in the context of being an ordinary peasant selected by the sovereign grace of God.
- Indeed, she tells us that this is exactly what to expect of God – that he grants mercy and grace to the humble, but brings down the proud. God's character, not Mary's, is the subject of this psalm of praise.
- God is the one who brings down the proud; the humble need not trouble themselves with it. In this He is to be praised.
- Finally, God is faithful to his promises. The Messiah was promised long before, the Holy One of Israel. God does not forget his promises, but brings his words to fruition in his own, precise time.

Mary, it seems, knew God well.

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[1] There is much confusion over this. Protestants tend to overreact to Mary and diminish her importance. She is not important for what she did as much as for what she was chosen for. If you strip away the idolatry of the worship of Mary so common in the Roman Catholic church you will find a model for the Christian in one sentence: "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord." Obedience is still the way to God's heart.

[2] From the first word of these verses in the Latin Vulgate translation.

The doctrine of the Incarnation

We began this lesson by stating that Luke's factual nature is important to the Christian. In the song of Zacharias we can see the prophetic nature of Christ's coming – and much else of sound doctrine as well.

Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her. And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father. But his mother answered and said, "No indeed; but he shall be called John." And they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name." And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called. And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, "His name is John." And they were all astonished. And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed,* and he *began* to speak in praise of God. Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child *turn out to* be?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant-- As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old-- Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US; To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant, The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS; To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins, Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace." And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.
(Luke 1:57-80 NASB)

Please note these six prophecies:

- God "has accomplished" the redemption of his people. The atonement of Christ is so sure, so much in God's will, that it is described as a future fact.
- God has sent the "horn of salvation." The horn (think of an ox horn) was the symbol of power and strength. This salvation is not one which must be achieved by our muscle and sweat – but by the power of God.
- This is done by the forgiveness of sins. Even here we see that the Cross will sweep away the barrier between man and God.
- This is in fulfillment of the words spoken by the prophets. This is no sudden thing; God has planned this from the beginning of the universe.
- We shall not be left out of this; he has given us a part in which to serve Him in holiness and righteousness. By his power and grace we can become the servants of the most high God.
- He will guide us by his light – into the path of peace.

That was a mouthful, wasn't it? And a solid description of the Incarnation – and its results.

Challenge to doctrine

Let's put this simply: all significant heresies for the last two thousand years have challenged either the humanity of Christ or the divinity of Christ. Why? Because Satan knows the truth: only the one who was fully God and fully man could make the atonement for our sins. If Christ is not human, there is no atonement – for the sacrifice must be from among one of us. If Christ is not divine, there is no atonement – for only the divine could keep him from sin, and keep him perfect to be the sacrifice. If there is no atonement, there is no reason for the church – whose mission is to spread the Good News ("Gospel") of the reconciliation of God and man – through the atonement of Christ. All depends upon this. Therefore we are given the work which was carefully researched, reviewed with eyewitnesses and diligently ordered – so that we might know and believe the truth.

Credo

Let me be perfectly clear with you. I believe.

- I believe – because of the overwhelming evidence found in history.
- I believe – because the evidence of my own eyes shows me the power of Christ to change lives.
- I believe – because I know the changes he has made in me, changes I could not have done in my own power.

You may ask, just what do I believe? May I point you to the first and oldest of the creeds – summaries of the faith given to the believer to be memorized so that they might be kept in the faith. It is called the Apostles' Creed – not because they wrote it, but because it teaches what they taught.

1. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

2. And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord:

3. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary:

4. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell:

5. The third day he rose again from the dead:

6. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty:

7. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead:

8. I believe in the Holy Ghost:

9. I believe in the holy catholic church: the communion of saints:

10. The forgiveness of sins:

11. The resurrection of the body:

12. And the life everlasting. Amen.

God helping, I can do no other.

Reactions - Luke 2:1-39

It is not at all unexpected, really, but it still surprises some Christians. Talk to people about what a wonderful church you have, and you will get a polite smile. Tell them what a genius your Bible teacher is, and they'll have an even more polite smile – and a burning desire to talk about sports. But talk about Jesus – that's different. It seems that no one ever was lukewarm or polite about Jesus. Intense curiosity, hatred, a desire to see his name eliminated from the language - all these are normal reactions to Jesus, the Christ.

In this passage we shall see the first reactions to Jesus, while still an infant. These reactions have lessons for us today; lessons from those who hear about Jesus; from those who know about God; from those who love him.

Reaction: those who hear

Consider, first, the shepherds.

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. "This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.
(Luke 2:1-20 NASB)

Angels, it seems, are usually sent in disguise but occasionally in full uniform, whatever that might be. The reaction of the typical person is quite simple: they're scared half to death. It's a reaction that's easy to understand:

- Most of us have sense enough to know we're sinners. Not perfect, and not anxious to be reminded of that fact.
- So when the angels appear, and we are reminded of the existence of the holy and sovereign God, we know we're in trouble.
- But, as the angel says here, "Do not be afraid." Why? Because the angel has come to announce good news – to sinners, of all people.

And what is this good news? We forget that the word "gospel" means just that:

- We have been given a savior – one who can deal with our sins as we cannot.
- He is the Christ – the long awaited Messiah. God now fulfills his promises which date back millennia.
- He is also Lord – one with power over all things, and therefore we should expect great and wondrous things.

One might also notice something about the angels that is a surprise to most: practical instruction. The angel takes no time to explain; he simply announces and then tells them how to identify the baby. Having done that, the rest of the incident consists of giving glory to God, which is evidently the chief function of the angels.

In a hurry

It's worth noting that the shepherds did not amble into Bethlehem, nor did they hold a planning meeting on what to do with the sheep. They hurried. Straight to Bethlehem. It is no accident that Satan tells the world to be cautious, go slowly in anything resembling righteousness – but of course "go for the gusto" in anything sinful. It sometimes surprises people just how challenging the Christian life is. It has an immediate, "right now" quality to it that is best seen from the inside.

They hurried – and they found what was promised. Isn't it amazing? When we go into something with a half-hearted, who cares attitude, we're not disappointed when it turns out to be bland and boring. But if we hurry to do the things of God, how much difference do we see! Those who take God at his word – completely – find what he promises is not only true; it's a challenge and adventure.

Sharing the news

Those who genuinely hear the word of God react in a very predicable way: they want to tell everyone else about it. We seem to have the feeling that we can talk about it only after years of deep study and meditation, much experience and prayer. It is not so. The reason is simple: the good news is not from us, but from God. The shepherds acknowledged that, and therefore were unafraid to speak.

Two other things are shown here which we should expect:

- People are going to marvel at what we say. Expect it. It's God's good news; they weren't expecting it.
- Just because we've heard the news does not mean that we suddenly all become street corner preachers. These men went back to their sheep. God comes to us where we live, and usually he expects us to stay there and work for him.

Reaction: those who know see his promise fulfilled

And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was *then* called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to

present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY *firstborn* MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed-- and a sword will pierce even your own soul--to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. At that very moment she came up and *began* giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.
(Luke 2:21-38 NASB)

Knowing God

Simeon has been given a promise: he will not die until he sees the Lord's Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ. What kind of man receives such a blessing?

- He was a *righteous* man – it is the pure in heart who see God.
- He was a *devout* (God-fearing) man – one who believed that God can and does act in accordance with his word.
- He was a man who *believed what he was told.* If God said it, then it would happen.

Happy is the man in whom the Lord reposes such trust.

Testimony

A man of such character is listened to, and he therefore begins his testimony to the crowd around him.

- He tells them that the fulfillment of the promise made to him has now arrived. He can die in peace, departing this world fulfilled.
- He tells them what this baby means – salvation. Salvation prepared by God for all the people of the world.
- He tells them of what has been shown to him: that this baby will become a light to the Gentile world and be the glory of Israel.

But his message to the parents is deep and troubling; it is his to warn them of what will come. His words would seem both good and bad to Mary:

- He will cause the "fall and rise" of many in Israel. His coming will upset the entire social order of the world, not just in Israel. When Christ touches a man, one thing is certain – that man is changed.

- He will become a "sign spoken against" – no one will be lukewarm towards him; those who hear of him will love him or hate him.
- His life and words will expose the thought of many. Those who love righteousness will be drawn to his light; those who love evil will curse it.

It is to Mary, however, that the bitterest of prophecies is made: He will pierce her very soul with a sword. She will see her first born son, the one she loves, the one so special, nailed to a Cross – and be executed as a common criminal.

Not a solo flight

It is a great consolation to those who study the word of God – we are not alone. Many others have spent the hours in the word, delighting themselves and then writing down what God has revealed to them. The life of learning in Christ is not a solo flight. We see that in Anna.

Remember, please, this is a time when women were to be silent. Anna would not normally be one to speak out. (Think how little Mary says in the Gospels.) But her role has not prevented her preparation; she fasts, she prays – she lives the devotional life, her heart set on God. So when the time came, she was ready.

What does the ready soul do when it encounters Christ? Action!

- She gave thanks; God gives good things, we should be thankful.
- She tells others about the good news.

We know no more about Anna than this; but that is sufficient.

Mary's reaction

We have left this to last, for of all those who saw Jesus on this day she is the one most deeply affected. Luke gives us very little to go on, but that little is sufficient for those who love Jesus, as Mary surely did. Here, then, is what the lover of Christ, who is the lover of our souls, did:

But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.
(Luke 2:19 NASB)

Treasure

The word in the Greek used here is variously translated; "kept," "remembered," "treasured," "continued to treasure." The meaning is clear; she kept these memories, safeguarding them over the years as Jesus grew up.

Some of us have poor memories of the past; often that is because the past seems so cruel. But the past, especially the blessings of the past, has its uses in the present:

- The past can be a *guide.* We often learn from our mistakes (though evidently not often enough); do we consider our past as a lesson given by the blessing of God?
- The past can be a *solace.* We can remember the times when God came to us in our griefs and fears, and take comfort that he has not changed.
- The past can be our *assurance.* He cared for us then; he will care for us now. He told us that he prepares a place for us; anywhere with Jesus I can safely go.

Ponder

Again, the word is variously translated. It is "meditate," "ponder," "gave much thought," "thought deeply," "wondered about," "dwelling on," "holding them dear." Often we hear that God wants our hearts; some conclude that the intellect should be left at the church door. It is not so; indeed, the past is source material for the intellect, and we should use it as such.

We must remember the pitfalls in this if we are to understand the reason for this word, "ponder." Left to ourselves, with no desire to think on the past, we will soon construct our own, favorable version of our history. The past becomes rosy, or a place of triumph remembered – anything but real. But if the intellect is to perform its function we must be honest; the intellectual life is the life examined. Mary pondered "all these things" – not just the ones she liked.

In her heart

- The Greek is *kardia*, which means heart. The presumed seat of the emotions, it is here to remind us that intellectual assent is not sufficient; we must translate our thoughts into action. To do so we must train our emotions properly, producing the right response. Are we convicted of our sin? We should learn to weep and repent. Has God been especially good to us? We should learn to rejoice and give thanks. Combining the emotions with the thoughts helps build the will in the soul.

Sometimes we deny it, but there is usually a right emotional response to any given situation. If some punk is burning Old Glory, it is right to react in righteous anger. The right response to God's discipline is training in the way of God.

The Challenge

May I pose you these three questions?

When you meet Jesus, what do you do? When suddenly he appears in your life, are you like the shepherds?

- Do you give glory to God?
- Do you act upon what you find?
- Do you tell others?

When God fulfills his promises to you, what do you do? Are you ready to do what he wants you to do?

- Are you ready to testify for Him?
- Are you ready to speak to one and all, friend or stranger?
- Are you ready to rejoice with those who are likewise blessed?

If you are one who loves Jesus deeply,

- Do you treasure his love?
- Do you ponder his words?
- Do you prepare your heart for his coming?

In these little matters we might find a guide even for today.

Lessons Learned - Luke 2:41-52

Readers with military experience will understand why I do not consider basic training, as delivered by the Unites States Army, to be a model of educational technique. Most of what I learned about the art of legitimate killing has faded with time. But there is one particular lesson I do remember.

The session began with our drill sergeant holding a pugil stick. Imagine a Q-tip about six feet long with a boxing glove at each end. It was the training tool to teach us the various maneuvers with the rifle and bayonet. There are over a hundred such maneuvers, and we quickly gave up trying to write them down in our little notebooks. Each maneuver had two demonstrations: "this is the knife thrust to the groin" was followed by "this is the counter to the knife thrust to the groin." So it went, until the very last maneuver: "this is the butt stroke to the head." But no counter.

There's always one fool whose curiosity overrides his sense. That was me. Like a moth to the flame, I asked, "Drill sergeant, what's the counter to the butt stroke to the head?"

"I'm glad you asked that, troop. Come up here and I'll demonstrate it." He handed me a pugil stick, made sure that I knew how to deliver the butt stroke to the head, and then asked, "Ready?"

I was about to reply when he took the bottom end of his pugil stick and rammed it through my chin, sending me flying backwards. When the laughter subsided, the drill sergeant said, "The counter is to hit the other guy first."

I suspect Mary and Joseph felt the same way about this incident. Of all the things of Jesus' boyhood, we know only this one – and I suspect it's because it's the one with the pain associated with it.

Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He became twelve, they went up *there* according to the custom of the Feast; and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they *began* looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's *house?*" But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all *these* things in her heart. And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.
(Luke 2:41-52 NASB)

We shall see lessons learned by his parents, his teachers, and by his example.

Lessons from his parents

As far as I can determine, God never lays out the qualifications for raising Jesus. What does it take to be the earthly parents of the Son of God? The Omniscient One likely used great care in picking out this couple. Let us see what might have made them find favor with God:

- Both were *obedient* to the Law. This is the solid ground of faith, for without obedience it is impossible to have faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God.
- Indeed, they went beyond the Law's requirements. By the Law of Moses, all males (usually defined as twelve years old and above) were required to present themselves at the Temple for Passover. But this family went as a group. Mary's presence was not required; indeed, some argument could be made for her to stay home and watch the other children, all of whom would have been too young to stay by themselves.
- It is apparent that they were not alone in this, for they assumed that their son was in the company of friends and relatives – also traveling back from the Passover. They lived in a community of faith and obedience.

It's a solid example.

"Unaware of it"

It may seem remarkable to parents of a generation in which children are abducted with all too great a frequency, but they let this twelve year old young man watch after himself, expecting him to check in at nightfall. This tells us something about their parenting style:

- It's obvious that they trusted him. Most of us would consider this a lucky accident, to have a child who could be trusted so much at twelve. But remember that in their society, this was the age at which one began to assume the responsibilities of a man. Their relationship was one of trust, not one of glowering mistrust.
- From that we can conclude that their parenting style was designed to produce adults – not adult size children. They expected him to act in a manner that we today would find unusual. As my wife and I put it, they weren't raising chickens for Colonel Sanders, they were raising eagles to fly.
- Even when they find him, you can see the reaction they give. These are pious people; they find him in the temple – and they want to know why. They even go so far as to explain why (their feelings). It's an adult conversation. Can you imagine the effect this would have on most twelve year olds today? Most parents would be screaming, but they are treating him as one who has shown himself responsible.

"Did not understand"

One thing that resonates with me: they did not understand the answer. Has that ever happened to you – that Christ gave you an answer you didn't understand? They were looking for him with anguish; he was where he was supposed to be.

- Sometimes God does that with us. Bob Henneman relates a story about how the Coast Guard solved the mystery of the sinking of the Great Lakes freighter *Edmund Fitzgerald.*

What prompted the reassessment of the sinking is that a few years back the Atlantic Gypsum Conveyor, a conveyer ship full of gypsum, was sailing up the East Coast. A conveyer ship is similar to a tanker, but with onboard conveyer belts below the main deck to self-load dry cargo like chalk, gypsum, talc, etc. A door at the side of the stern allows the ship to offload herself to train cars or hoppers on the dock. The crew of this particular conveyor ship had failed to properly secure this door. In only slightly

rough seas, each wave dumped a little more water into the conveyer passage and on into the holds. The gypsum quickly absorbed it, thus becoming very heavy. A Coast Guard plane happened by, and noticed that the ship was very low in the water. It started to video tape the ship, and radioed the crew to offer assistance. The crew responded, basically saying "Help? Why would we need help? Things couldn't be better." The Coast Guard pointed out that the ship was about to sink, which the ship's master did not believe until it was too late. About 10 minutes later the ship dipped her bows into a trough, and never came back up. She rolled over and was on the bottom of the ocean inside of a minute. I don't recall the number of casualties. Had that Coast Guard plane not happened along and alerted the captain and crew, they might have all disappeared without a trace, creating yet another mysterious ship loss.

As a result of this incident, the NTSB decided to re-examine the Edmund Fitzgerald with new video technology which was not available the last time they looked at her wreck. The NTSB also had the Coast Guard revoke the operating certificate of the conveyer ship's sister ship until the door was modified to prevent a repeat accident.

We are often in the position of that ship's master: Why should I need help? God's answer is not understood – until the ship sinks.

You can see that in one little phrase – that Mary treasured these things in her heart. She did not understand at the time – but she knew that it was important. God gives no trivial answers.

Lessons via his teachers

There is a temptation to interpret this passage as the young Jesus telling off the hypocrites in the Temple. Instead, he shows them the proper respect for teachers:

- He *listens* to them. If the teachers of Christ have any one request of you, that's it. Listen. It is not only respect, it is for your profit. Even if all that we do were simply to gratify our own egos, it would still be of benefit to you.
- He *questions* them. And I thank him for the example. Please, ask questions; it's the best way for the teacher to know what's going on in your mind. It is also profitable to the teacher; often, you will point out that which he had not considered.
- You are to do this, even if you know the teacher to be a hypocrite. Our Lord sets the example and gives this as command.[3]

"All who heard"

Permit me two points, as the teacher.

- Please note the word, "all." The word of God is for all, our Lord not denying any who will come. No one need be turned away; all should be made welcome.
- Please note the word, "heard." Are we listening?

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[3] Matthew 23:1-3

The example of Christ

Older scholars often referred to the life of Christ as being "exemplary." By this they meant not only that it was morally correct but also that it is to be an example to us. We ask, "What would Jesus do?" Then we forget to look in the Gospels to find out what He did.

In his Father's house

Over the front door of my house is a wooden sign, engraved with our family name. My children call this home; it is always thought of as "returning home." The Temple is the place where God put his name; it has Jesus' Father's name on the sign over the door, so to speak. It's where He belongs. But there is more to it; the house of the Lord goes by many names. Here are three:

- It is the *house of prayer.*[4] In my youth churches rarely had locks on the doors. I asked about this once; the answer was simply that we did not know when someone might come in need of prayer.
- It is a *house of sacrifice.*[5] We speak much of giving, even giving generously. These people understood that tithes and offerings were one thing; sacrifices another. We do not hear much about sacrifice these days.
- It is the "*Tabernacle of Witness*".[6] It is the place where you can see visibly the witness God bears against sin. In the first temple, it was the Ark of the Covenant, also called the "ark of the testimony." In our time, you need but look forward to see the Cross at the center – God's testimony against our sin.

Jesus expected them to know where He was

Little noted in most studies of this passage is the reaction of our Lord. He obviously thought his parents should have been smart enough to figure out where he would be. What can we learn from this?

- He must have had a track record for this – one who lingered in the synagogue, for example, learning all he could. How many of us could say that we would linger at church? Do we hunger and thirst after righteousness?
- He also expected that they would know that he put God first – even ahead of them. If the center of the wheel is in the right place, all the spokes fit.
- Indeed, "God first" should be our witness. It should stand out and be obvious.

He continued in obedience

- This obedience is a model to us – children or adults. Obedience (or subjection, in our translation) is not a burden even to the Christ. It is the first step in knowing God.
- Note, please, that he "continued" in subjection. The point is not clear in all translations, but the original has it correctly. It does not mean he obeyed his parents in this one instance, but that he continued to obey them. It's a marathon, not a sprint.
- Note also: the trip to the Temple must have been a "mountain top experience" for the young Jesus. How calmly he makes the trip down! Can we say that we are willing to come down from the mountain top experience – and be the same person in the valley of troubles below?

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[4] Isaiah 56:7
[5] 2 Chronicles 7:12
[6] 2 Chronicles 24:6

Growing

It is not right to expect that a Christian can achieve maturity in a day. This teacher certainly is taking longer than that. But see how Jesus grew:

- He grew in stature, physically – but also in wisdom. Did you know that the book of Proverbs was given to provide wisdom for the young?[7] If he needed to, surely the rest of us do.
- He grew in favor with men. As Christians, we should seek to be those who are known for doing what is right. Combined with a gentle spirit, we should find ourselves more and more in favor with those around us.
- He grew in favor with God. Surely here is a testimony that he is fully human!

So, let me ask you: are you growing in God these days?

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[7] Proverbs 1:8

A Voice in the Wilderness - Luke 3:1-14

It is a rather consistent pattern: the prophets tended to be dwellers in the wilderness. Perhaps it is so because they can hear God so much more clearly there, away from the pressures and bustle of the city. Whatever the reason, John was there.

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT. 'EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH; AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.'" So he *began* saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. "Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." And *some* tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." *Some* soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And *what about* us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse *anyone* falsely, and be content with your wages."
(Luke 3:1-14 NASB)

The word of the Lord came

John is, of course, the last of the Old Testament (i.e., old covenant) prophets. It is fitting therefore that he should be in the wilderness, as they were. But in this we have some notes which may be heard today:

- Please note – "the word." There is no sense of ambiguity in this; God makes it perfectly clear to him what must be done. As we shall see, this is in keeping with his message of repentance.
- Please note – "of the Lord." This is not the wild imagining of John, nor the latest consensus of political correctness. It is God's message; the prophet is there to deliver it.
- Please note – "in the wilderness." It's where you look for prophets – usually crying, one way or another. Do not expect the word of God to come to you through the functions of this world.
- Please note – he did not simply hear the word; he did it.

John's Message

John preaches a "baptism of repentance." We can examine these two words to our profit (pun intended) as well:

Physical immersion

Man is a hybrid animal, an amphibian – both material and spiritual. These two natures are not separate, so therefore that which happens in one realm affects the other. Baptism is the material sign of repentance. It is the picture of washing the filth off your body – getting rid of what is foul. But it has one other meaning here which we might miss.

The ceremony for accepting a Gentile as a Jewish proselyte used baptism as well. The implications of this are radical; as Jesus said, you must be born again. John is telling them they must do what a sincere proselyte would do. Can we see through their eyes?

- This would be an act of humility – one which would place a life-long Jew on the same level with a Gentile who had just converted to Judaism.
- This would be a new beginning – a welcome thought to the repentant sinner, but repugnant to those sure of their position.
- This would also tell the people that God does not play favorites. The Gentile proselyte is baptized; so are you.

Repentance

The spiritual parallel is repentance – the art of making a spiritual U-turn. What is this thing, repentance?

- It is an admission of guilt. You don't repent if you're not guilty.
- More than that, it is the attempt to set matters right – you want to atone for what you've done; you seek the forgiveness of those wronged.
- It is not merely ceasing to do evil; it is replacing evil with good.

And, please, it is not merely individual. We are responsible for our own actions – we are also part of a society. There comes a time for repentance by a people, too.

The spoken word

Shall we see what the man has to say?

"you brood of vipers"

This has two very disturbing implications to the Jew of this time:

- The viper would immediately remind them of Satan. John is, in effect, calling them children of the devil. (Christ will do likewise). It seems that he is not complaining of just one particular sin, but their sinful lives.
- Worse yet, it seems to be hereditary (brood). How can a man change his heredity? If I'm a hereditary sinner, how can I escape it?

"who warned you?"

Whoever warned them, it obviously wasn't Satan, the head viper. But this warning shows us other things:

- Somebody warned them. In our era, this is the function of the Holy Spirit. God sent the prophets of old and last His Son to turn us from our evil ways. He does not leave us to figure it out on our own.

- Which, of course, means that we needed the warning, right? That carries two implications: first, we deserve it (we're sinners). Second, if we don't repent, we're going to get it.

And what are we going to get?

"the wrath to come"

A preacher of my acquaintance was always fond of saying, "God is angry with the wicked all day long." None of us would deny that justice has not found full fruit in this world. There are many who owe Saddam Hussein much. But even with the worst of sinners, God desires repentance, which brings a man close to God.

So God desires justice; he is patient and waiting – but not forever. The day will come when he will judge the living and the dead – the Day of Wrath. The day in which the evil get what they've been asking for.

Our Defenses

If we are accused of something, we have essentially three choices – defend our innocence, admit our guilt, or render our excuses. John anticipates such a defense, or excuse. Their defense is simple: we are the chosen people of God.

Now, to our ears, this sounds like no defense at all. But let's put it in more modern terms: the unknowing hypocrite. Here, for your use, is my personal test for same. Consider the worship service on Sunday morning:

- Do you walk out praising the sermon ("Great job, rev! Right on!") knowing well that it will have no effect on your life? Glad that the preacher knows the difference between preaching and meddling?
- Do you love the music we have – and its effect on your heart lasts no longer than the last note?
- Are you willing to put something in the offering – but resent the word "tithe" as a reminder? Heaven forbid that someone should bring up the concept of a sacrifice!

"from these stones"

If we feel that way, John points out some simple facts. Adam, we are told, was created from the dust of the ground. The elements that make up our bodies are the same ones used in horses. God created Adam; if he wants to, he can raise up his children from stones. Therefore, our church heritage, our holy heredity, is God's gift to us. God does not "owe" us anything.

Some of us, however, feel we have God in a box. He can't discipline us; he can't condemn us – look at how much work we've done for him. We forget that he will have mercy on those he will have mercy on. It is grace; his choice, not ours.

"axe at the root"

Over and again God warns his people: if you will not turn from sin, I will destroy you and raise up those who will honor my commandments. This phrase is awesome in its warning:

- Note that the axe is at the root – the sign that the tree is destined to be completely eradicated. One prunes with a pruning hook, not an axe. This is destruction, not discipline.
- The test of the tree is simple: Produce good fruit – or die.

The fruit of repentance

John now describes the good fruit the tree of repentance should produce.

Share your possessions

We sometimes skip this part. But may I point out a few little items about this tunic?

- Note that the man who has <u>two</u> is to share – John is not talking to the rich who have a closet full of clothes. This example extends down to the least of us.
- We might ask, then, what happens then? Suppose I do? Foolishness! Consider the lilies of the field; he will provide for you, too.
- And, please, note the word: share. We are not to give with condescension, but with the warm heart of a friend sharing with a friend.

Honesty with money

Most of us are willing to be honest – until it costs. We are very good at justifying our petty frauds (the government will never know what I really gave to Goodwill). But do you not see the hypocrisy in this? We condemn our politicians (think of Gray Davis) for financial improprieties; little things that skirt the edge of the law. But we think ourselves clever for doing the same. Tell me, what kind of businessman do you like to deal with? The one who is just this side of fraud, or the one who is scrupulous about his honesty? Go thou, and do likewise.

The use of authority

It is a sad, but common, sight: the petty authority abusing his position. Sometimes it is for personal gain – those who have dealings in non-Christian societies often take for granted the bribe needed to get things through customs. Sometimes it is for self satisfaction – John here chastises those who would make false accusations ("He's probably guilty of something.") The issue is not the guilt of others; it's ours. When we abuse the authority given us, it rots us out from the inside.

John's cure is all too simple: contentment. These things are done because we tell ourselves that this civil service job doesn't pay well enough, the rules of evidence are too strict – in short, something's wrong, it's depriving me and I'm going to fix it. You may fix it by breaking you.

Spiritual Fruit

You may have noticed that we have skipped over Luke's quotation from Isaiah. John's lesson is for repentance you can see; Isaiah taught a deeper lesson. His words are here so that you might know the spiritual side of repentance.

Spiritual repentance – what we must do

It's stated quite clearly: we must make ready a place for the Lord. That place is in our hearts. Christ is the perfect gentleman. Note that when he tells us that he stands at the door and knocks, he's not talking to non-Christians but to the church. He will not break in. He will wait for you to prepare a place for him within.

More than that is required: do not ask the Christ to come to you by the devious and twisted paths of the sinner. Don't try to bargain with him, saying, "I need to hang on to this sin – but I'll go to church every Sunday…" Make the path straight, for the Sinless One will not walk a crooked path.

Spiritual repentance – what He <u>will</u> do

- He will eliminate the valleys – the downs and despair that come from the hopelessness of life without him. He fills our valleys with hope.
- He will cut down the mountains – the mountains of our pride and self satisfaction.
- He will make the crooked straight – turning you from one who is devious and knows every crooked way to one who is a "straight arrow."
- He will make the rough spots smooth – taking the froth of your rebellion and recalcitrance and turning it into the flow of still water, running deep.

Prepare a place for him; make straight the path to your heart.

Past, Present and Future - Luke 3:15-38

Luke, in his account, gives us the warnings of John, then the baptism of Christ, followed by a genealogy. We will reverse this order as it may prove easier to comprehend.

John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people. But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done, Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison. Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Hesli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Heber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.
(Luke 3:16-38 NASB)

Past

Many people have attempted, and failed, to read through the entire Bible in a year. There are a number of stopping points; the most common one is the “begats.” Unless you happen to be one of those people who enjoys researching your family history, genealogies usually are rather boring. My father solemnly warned me against such research; his uncle took up this hobby during the Great Depression and wound up with thirty-one relatives living with him.

They have their uses, however:

- For the people of the time, they would be like the family scrapbook – a way to remember who was who. In some instances (such as those who could become priests) it was necessary to prove descent from some particular ancestor.
- One other thing they provide is this: we are dealing with real people. Some characters in the Old Testament have no genealogy; this always piques the curiosity of the scholars. Why did Elijah have no parents? What about Job? Real people have ancestors; they come from someplace.

- Genealogies give a sense of continuity which is lacking for us today. Most of us would have difficulty naming all eight of our great-grandparents. Living in a society in which a man would trace his descent from Adam provides a great sense of belonging.

This particular genealogy, however, has its little problems. It does not concur with the one in Matthew until you get back to David, the king. Various explanations have been brought forth for this, but it is not regarded as a serious textual problem. Luke undoubtedly had a copy of Matthew's Gospel; failure to replicate his genealogy could hardly have been an accident. Of the explanations proposed, two stand out.

- The first holds that there are two lineages – one to establish the legal claim to the throne of David, and the other the physical descent.
- The other one is simpler: this is the genealogy not of Joseph but of Mary – which establishes his physical descent through her. In the custom of the time, her name would not be included.

Whichever is the correct explanation, this list gives rise to two of the favorite titles of our Lord, the ones he used most commonly:

- Son of man – descended from Adam, he is as human as we are.
- Son of David – in accordance with the promises and prophecies given, Jesus is the descendant of David who will rule forever on David's throne.

Does having an ancestry help, or hinder?

There is a practical side to genealogy for us. Permit me a minor digression.

My father was born, quite literally, on the wrong side of the tracks. The railroad was still the main form of long distance transportation, and in those days engines were powered by coal. Coal dust and ashes coated the down wind side of town. In his case, it was of more significance. Oil had been found there, and some of the residents were quite wealthy – those who had participated in the oil boom. It was a small town, and everyone knew just which side of the tracks you came from. They expected certain behavior from each group.

So oppressive was this system that it literally moved our family. My father was a career soldier; when he retired, he moved to California. I once asked him why. His reply was, simply, "Here, no one cares who your father was."

Consider, however, the opposite case. Suppose your parents were born on the right side; what then? Johann Sebastian Bach had twenty children; only two or three succeeded as composers. Were the others failures? Do you see how a worthy ancestor puts an additional burden on you? This is true in the church as well; what are your expectations of the preacher's kids?

Now consider this: those who have died in the Lord still live in him, and will be seen again at the last day. If you are the descendant of someone great in the church, do you suppose they have an opinion of you? The cloud of witnesses may be watching you.

Present

The instance of the present is the baptism of Jesus. It is more completely detailed in the other Gospels; we can but pick out some nuggets here.

The principle of example.

- From the very first the question arose, "John's baptism is for repentance. Why would Jesus, the sinless one, need that?" If you want the right answers, you have to ask the right questions. Let's try, "Why do *we* need to see our Lord baptized?"
- Have you considered what might have happened if he hadn't been? Many of us are willing to become Christians – but if we had a choice about admitting that we are sinners by being baptized, don't you think that some would think it beneath their royal dignity? But if Christ himself was baptized, what earthly king could think it beneath him?
- Think, also, what a royal privilege it is for us! The king of kings went through this ceremony; we are privileged to do likewise. It is our entrance into the royal priesthood.
- Finally, it is an example to us – of the humility and obedience of Christ. If he is so willing, how could we refuse?

The principle of identification

We must remember that Christ is fully human. This is a very human thing to do. So, if you will, he became like us, right down to baptism. And the purpose of this? So that we might become like him in his resurrection glory. It is written that he did this to fulfill all righteousness, and it is by baptism that we take on that righteousness.

The appearance of the Trinity

The incident also gives us the most visible picture of the Trinity.

- John had been given the prophecy that he would know the Christ by the fact that the Holy Spirit would descend on him like a dove.[8] Thus, this was planned so that all might know.
- The descent of the Spirit here tells us how the Spirit comes into our lives – he descends from God, not arises from us. And he does so, gently.
- Indeed, the dove is a symbol of gentleness. But do recall: only the truly strong can be gentle.

Future – the Judgment

John has a clear grasp of who the Christ is – in terms of his mission and task. He knows his own task, and therefore knows himself to be utterly unworthy for it. Would you like a sign that you truly know Christ? That's a good one.

- John is the last of the prophets of the Old Testament era – the ones under the Law. He is the prophet of the coming of the Holy One.
- He knows his own unworthiness. Just like Ezekiel; just like Daniel; just like all the others who saw the Living God.

But in this passage we see the prophet foretelling what is to come. Baptism does that; it is a symbol of the resurrection to come at the return of our Lord. On that day, even one so great as John the Baptist will be less than those in the kingdom. This is not for our own worthiness, but because of God's grace.

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[8] John 1:29-31

His fate

Prophets, it seems, are not particularly well qualified for diplomatic missions. John did what the prophets of old did; he rebuked the ruling class for its sins. He got the usual reward for it too.

Over and again – Paul and Festus spring to mind – we see the fascination that a prophet has for an evil ruler. Herod was fascinated by the man. I suspect it was his simplicity; here was the rare exception to the yes-men; here was one who was single-minded. Herod could admire the virtue, if not emulate it.

But, as we know, Herod eventually beheaded John. We need to remember that "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his godly ones."[9] The honor of dying for the cause of God is indeed great.

The Winnowing Fork

John also shared the style of preaching of the prophets. To understand his agricultural metaphor, we might need to know just what a winnowing fork is. Here's a picture of one:

This is one taken from an archeological site in Egypt, but it is contemporary with Christ. The process of winnowing grain was done in three steps. First, you drove the animals over the grain. That broke things down enough so that you could separate out the kernels. You did that by taking the winnowing fork and using it to rake out the straw – the wheat stalks. Once this was done, you tossed the result into the air with a stiff breeze blowing – which blew the chaff away.

So, to have the winnowing fork in hand meant that you were ready to do some serious work in separating the good from the bad.

When I was a jury foreman, I had to fill out the form needed to record the verdict. It had only two options: guilty or not guilty. We looked for middle ground, and found none. In God's judgment there is no fence to sit on.

More than that, we need to remember that he told us, many times, that he would come when unexpected. He's prepared to separate us.

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[9] Psalm 116:15

The real question is not what he's ready to do. The real question, as always, is simply this: are we ready for his return?

Satan's Point of View - Luke 4:1-13

(A more conventional treatment of this passage can be found in our series on the Life of Christ). It is sometimes interesting to go over to the enemy camp and ask, "Why did Satan do that?" That's how we shall treat this passage of Scripture.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.'" And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. "Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU,' and, 'ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.
(Luke 4:1-13 NASB)

General Thoughts

The first logical question is, "Why now?" Why did Satan pick this particular time to bring out his great temptations?

- Satan often brings his temptations when we are on a spiritual "high", as just after baptism. He hopes for false confidence and a sense of self-reliance. If we are quick to take credit for the spiritual uplift, he will be quick to try this.
- If he is successful, the spiritual "low" produced is very deep indeed, for we will think, "Wow – I was so high and still fell to temptation. I'm hopeless."
- Forty days of fasting will indeed produce a spiritual high – but a physical low. Satan hopes the body overrides the spirit.

As this translation makes clear, Satan has been tempting Jesus in little ways for those forty days. He's been chipping away with the little stuff, hoping to bring in the big temptations when Jesus was prepared for the little ones. Jesus, after all, is human like the rest of us.

We might also ask, "Why out in the wilderness? Wouldn't it be more effective in front of people?" Perhaps. But things that happen in the wilderness are out of sight, and that has its advantages for Satan as well.

- "No one will ever know." The smile of the temptress is seldom seen while you're holding your wife's hand. We are good at trusting in concealment.
- If successful, this produces the burden of a guilty secret – one of the finest handles Satan can have on a person.
- Even if no further external sin comes from it, we are then tempted to self-justification (purely in private, of course). By this we defile the conscience, and open many doors for Satan.

The First Temptation – the Flesh

The temptations of the flesh, while open to all ages, are most powerful in the young. (Jesus is about thirty, at the end of his youth.) They are therefore used to open the combat. Why the young?

- Hormones, for one thing. Sexual urges are strong in youth, and there seems also to be the ability to eat and not get fat.
- There is also the question of wisdom. We do not teach our children, by and large, to be wise. We teach them to be cool. Wisdom often arrives when it's too late to be of use.
- Sometimes it's simply the case that the other temptations have yet to ripen in appeal.
- If we do not deny the body, we are always open to this temptation.

"If you are the son of God"

Why did Satan phrase this as a question? Shouldn't he have said, "Since you are…"? The attack of pride will come later. Listen to the same attack on us: "If you are a child of God…"

- The "if" is there to stir doubt. How do you know you are really saved? Are you sure you're not just imagining this?
- There is also the temptation to go beyond the bounds – to blur the lines of right and wrong. After all, one shouldn't be legalistic about these things, right?

Remember: Satan cannot create. He can only twist. And he will twist a child of God into a child of hell if he can.

"Tell this stone to become bread"

The word "tell" is also translated "command." Note that he did not use "create" or "make" – but command.

- It seems so easy, but it is a misuse of the authority of the Son. Stones do not become bread. The Son has authority to do the Father's will.
- This is also a temptation to show off. There is the challenge of, "If you're really who you say you are, then …"
- Suppose it succeeds. The self-justification is pretty obvious; "I needed to do something bold and dramatic." Bold, dramatic and wrong. There is always a temptation to "do something, anything, even if it's wrong." Whatever you do somehow becomes the courageous course and the only option you had. We tend to vindicate the results after the fact.

The Second Temptation – The World

Think about this. The world is Satan's domain; all these kingdoms are his to give. Always, he seeks after prideful men who can be pitted against one another. Why, in this supreme test, would he offer so much power to Jesus?

The corruption of power

"Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely." Lord Acton had it right; Gandalf does not dare take the one ring. Power can be a blessing when you know what needs to be done; power for the sake of personal pomp and ego gratification is well known to be power corrupting. Power, especially political power, is inherently dangerous to the soul. This may be why God has given so little of it to his children.

Authority versus tyranny

- If you wish to know true authority as against tyranny, there is one simple question: who benefits? True authority benefits those in subjection to it (we call them public *servants*). Satan's model is that of the tyrant who manipulates his people to his will; Christ's model is that of the servant leader, who washes his disciples feet. When Satan gives power, it is only to those who will be corrupted by it, for he gives it in his own way.

It is interesting that our founding fathers understood this so well, and we understand it so poorly. They took a dim view of human nature, especially when exposed to the temptations of power. I would bring to your mind three of the principles which they espoused frequently:

- The first is that of checks and balances. This is needed to prevent temptation from getting a foothold. We may not fear the corruption of power, we may welcome it – but we might just fear the other fellow enough to restrain ourselves.
- They also assumed that only those of noble, virtuous spirit were fit to serve – and that we would not elect anyone else, knowingly. (Do you know who was the first divorced man to occupy the White House?)
- That also implies as its corollary that the population must be one motivated by Christian morality – a statement frequently found in the writings of our founding fathers. "When America ceases to be good, she will cease to be great." (De Tocqueville).
- The results of this – or of its lack, rather – are plain to all.

Rejection - Luke 4:14-30

A consistent sorrow to Christians is this: despite their best efforts, both in word and in life, there are family members who utterly reject Jesus Christ. It is a great heartache. Such people often look for some magic method of evangelism to deal with this. They love much; they want the best for their loved ones. But it is necessary to know that Christ told us there would be rejection, for he himself was despised and rejected.

And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. And He *began* teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, "Is this not Joseph's son?" And He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" And He said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. "But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, *in the land* of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. "And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." And all *the people* in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went His way.
(Luke 4:14-30 NASB)

Prophesy of Rejection

Many of us are very good at hearing only what we want to hear. We hear the joyous news of Christ; we do not hear his words telling us of rejection. But they are there:

- A consistent theme in the Old Testament prophecies is the rejection of the Holy One (the Messiah).[10] Christ took these prophecies seriously; he was under no illusions that everyone would love him.
- It is also prophesied that we shall be rejected as well.[11] Some will not believe us when we bring the good news.

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[10] Psalm 118:22-23
[11] Isaiah 53:1-4

Why?

This rejection seems strange to us. Why would anyone reject the good news of Jesus Christ? But they do, and often very vigorously. We may venture to suggest some reasons:

- They are "ever hearing, never understanding."[12] Teachers see this often. For those who have "math block" algebra is difficult, despite their intelligence. For those who have "God block" no set of words will crack the attitude inside.
- Some, when they encounter the man of God, see only the man and not the God. The good works they see are attributed to a happy nature. To see God requires the pure heart; the worldly heart cannot see him in us.
- For many, the matter is one of the consequences. To accept God means to live by his ways; to reject God means to live by our own ways. If we are stuck in sin, we may prefer our own muddy rut.

Results of rejection

God allows no evil unless from it he can make a greater good. The rejection of the Christ was worked into that greater good for us:

- Because the Jews rejected the message of Christ, the message was taken to the Gentiles – the whole world.[13] How God would have dealt with this had they accepted him we do not know – but we know the good he brought from rejection.
- Because Christ was rejected and scorned, the church reaches out not just to the socially acceptable but to all. There is no one who is so sinful as to be beyond the reach of repentance. So it is that the rejection of Christ has helped to build the church.
- Ultimately, the one whom this world rejected will return in glory, bringing in the "year of the Lord's favor." Known also as the year of Jubilee, it symbolizes the time in which all things will be renewed. Those who accept the rejection that comes with being a Christian will then see the favor of the Lord.

Rejection Defines

Rejection is not an "add-on" to the ministry of Christ; it is essential. Rejection creates the rugged character of his ministry, and it also creates that character in our own work. Why is this so?

- First, so that those who love Jesus will count the cost.[14] He will have no followers who are staying only through the picnic but running away from the storm. In war, you take the weather as it is. We are at war.
- Next, so that those who reject him can clearly see that we proclaim Christ not from selfish motives but from love.[15] By our suffering in rejection they see that we mean it.
- Finally, Christ shows us this character of our ministry so that we will be prepared for rejection – and know what to do when it comes. It is a hard thing, but we are to shake dust.[16]

So the ministry of Christ (and our ministry in Christ) is one which must be rugged enough to endure rejection. This would seem to make it hopeless thing – were it not for the fact that our ministry, like his, is given by the sovereignty of God. It moves not from our own power, but in his Spirit.

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[12] Isaiah 6:9-10
[13] Romans 9:31-33
[14] Matthew 8:19-20
[15] 2 Corinthians 4:5
[16] Matthew 10:14

- In Christ's ministry we clearly see the miraculous nature of his touch. It is a credential of authenticity, but it is also a sign that God has ordained this path of ministry. Christ does the right thing in the right way. Likewise, so should we.
- We also see the providence of God. Christ went his way, through an angry mob intent on killing him. How? By God's providence; his arrangement of events working all things together for the good of those who love him. Likewise, he will do the same for us; God's provision for God's work.
- This ministry is empowered by obedience. The Son can only do what the Father has shown him to do. Likewise, our obedience will be blessed with power from God.

The ministry of Christ is a ministry of deliverance, as is proclaimed in Isaiah as quoted here. We are delivered from sin into grace. We are to proclaim this deliverance so that others might so be delivered.

- It is a deliverance in righteousness, not amnesia. Deliverance does not erase the past, it makes amends for it. It is no accident that the Scripture tells us that God is faithful and just to forgive us. As we deliver others, we cannot forget the results of the sin – but we can be the ambassadors of reconciliation.
- We should also note that this deliverance was obtained at great cost – the blood of Christ. It is given, however, at no cost – for that is grace. As we have received, so we should give.
- Indeed, we are "saved to serve." We should never take our own deliverance lightly, for when we do others will see it as being of no great value. Let the world see what we prize – even at the cost of rejection.

The Model for the Disciple

It is good for us to see that our Lord was rejected in his own home town. It shows us that the rejection we get from our own families and friends is not some strange accident, but very much to be expected. They rejected Jesus; they will reject us too. Christ is very clear on this point:

- He tells us clearly that following him will cause division in our families.[17] It is not strange, it is normal. It is also heartbreaking.
- By that same example, we may discover that we have more success outside our families than within! This too is normal.
- Of great sadness is this: there are those in our family who once knew the Lord, but now have rejected him. This is indeed deadly, but our Lord tells us that such people have no way back. Their former beliefs cannot cover their present rejection.[18]

We might well ask why. It hurts us greatly to see such people in our family. The great temptation is to stop and spend all our effort on those we love so much. But we are commanded to "shake dust."[19] As our pastor put it, "No one has the right to hear the Gospel twice until everyone has heard the Gospel once."

Rejection and God's power

It puzzles us: why, if God is so mighty, does he not smooth the road for us, giving us eloquent tongues, powerful miracles and (while we're asking) angelic assistance?

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[17] Matthew 10:34-36
[18] See Hebrews 6:4-6 and Hebrews 10:28-31
[19] Matthew 10:14-15

Because his power is made perfect through our weakness. We need to remember that rejection is a part of that perfection.

- We are rejected not for ourselves but for Christ.[20] God is love; he will woo, he will not force our love in return. To make this voluntary is to create the possibility of rejection. It is not our doing, but his.
- Indeed, God has deliberately provided us with a message that many regard as foolishness – the message of the Cross.[21] It is a sign of his power that the Cross goes from shame to glory.

He does this for one reason: so that those who hear the word can understand it is not of our own invention, nor is it sugar-coated to make it look nice. It is hard and rugged and not at all slickly attractive. It is reality itself.

A blessing

God knows that we are weak. He knows that enduring his rugged road will not be easy. But his way is the only way, and he provides his blessings upon it.

- In this world we shall be those who build upon the rock.[22] Despite the storms of life, we will stand firm in him.
- He also tells us that in the age to come our walk with him will reap great blessings.[23]

But there is a final warning: there is no fence to sit on. If we confess him, he will confess us before the Father. If we deny him, he will deny us.[24] It matters not how smooth is the road – if it leads to the wrong end.

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[20] Luke 10:16
[21] 1 Corinthians 1:118-25
[22] Matthew 7:26-27
[23] Luke 6:22-23
[24] Matthew 10:32-33

Third Temptation – Pride

It is no secret that pride is Satan's most powerful weapon. To understand how it works in this instance, we must first understand our relationship with God.

That relationship, usually called faith, is a trust relationship. Trust relationships are not invulnerable; they can be destroyed:

- They can be killed by a suspicious desire for proof. If you hire a detective to check on your wife's fidelity, there are only two possible outcomes. Both of them are bad.
- They can be killed by presumption. Literate readers will recall James Hunt's poem, *The glove and the lions.* Her lover jumps into the lion's den to retrieve her glove – and flings it in her face to rebuke her vanity.
- They can be killed by manipulation. Men of my generation will recall how commonly we tested the girls with "prove your love." (Why women did not reply asking us to prove our love by waiting until marriage I do not know. I am told the problem is now history, so we will not waste time on it.)

All of these are caused by pride.

Pride is the attack of Satan on the true Christian. Note, please, that only in this instance does Satan quote Scripture. The passage quoted is darkly prophetic (Psalm 91) and not at all clearly applicable. But as we said, Satan cannot create, he can only twist.

Do you think this does not apply to us? Have you ever heard anyone justify his conduct by quoting (usually out of context) some particular verse of Scripture?

Satan's aim, of course, is to produce a Pharisee. It is no accident that Jesus had harsh words for them, and practically no one else. A double dealer in matters financial might be shamed; one who is a hypocrite in the things of God is the most difficult of all people to be moved to repentance. The evil produced is of a horrible kind.

Opportune Time

Satan fails, and withdraws until a "more opportune time." As far as we can infer, that time came in the garden at Gethsemane. Here he warned the disciples about temptation; here they failed. Here he triumphed.

Consider the fruits of that triumph!

- He shows us that even in the greatest of temptations man can resist. We are encouraged to resist – and Satan will flee.[25]
- We also know that he was tempted like we are – and therefore knows our agony.[26]
- Most of all, we know there can be no alliance between Christ and Satan – nor is there.[27]

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[25] James 4:7
[26] Hebrews 4:15
[27] John 14:30

The great divide between good and evil has been shown; there is no fence to sit on. It is good to be on the winning side.

The Example of Christ - Luke 4:31-44

We often seek for deep meaning in the Scriptures. Sometimes the meaning is right in front of us; the best method of teaching is still by example:

And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and He was teaching them on the Sabbath; and they were amazed at His teaching, for His message was with authority. In the synagogue there was a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, "Let us alone! What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are--the Holy One of God!" But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst *of the people,* he came out of him without doing him any harm. And amazement came upon them all, and they *began* talking with one another saying, "What is this message? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits and they come out." And the report about Him was spreading into every locality in the surrounding district. Then He got up and *left* the synagogue, and entered Simon's home. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Him to help her. And standing over her, He rebuked the fever, and it left her; and she immediately got up and waited on them. While the sun was setting, all those who had any *who were* sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and laying His hands on each one of them, He was healing them. Demons also were coming out of many, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ. When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them. But He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose." So He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.
(Luke 4:31-44 NASB)

God's Worker

We may begin by examining this passage carefully, looking at Jesus as God's worker – as one of us might be.

Authority

The first thing we note is the authority in which God's worker moves and acts. In our day all authority seems to come from the government; we forget that all authority belongs to Christ. What can we see here?

- Authority comes from responsibility; they walk hand in hand in the kingdom of God. If you have authority to cast out demons, you are obliged to use it. God is the perfect leader, and in his work authority and responsibility match. So, ultimately, will reward.
- Authority is carried personally. There is no sense in which we can see Jesus acting as if, "Today I will assume the role of exorcist." The president does not cease to be the president because he goes upstairs and puts on his pajamas. God's worker does not cease to be God's just because he's on his secular job. Authority is personal.
- All authority now descends from Christ, to whom all authority is given. If you cannot trace your authority back to him – usually through the responsibility you are given – then you don't have it.

Uncompromising righteousness

It sometimes puzzles readers why Jesus commanded the demons to be silent – when they were telling the truth in their terror. But is it not obvious that the legions of light can have nothing to do with the darkness? The example is not limited to ancient times:

- We now hear the pantheist chant: "all religions are equally true." Which is to say, they are all equally false. Does anything else in this world have such a characteristic? To use the obvious example, are all presidential candidates equal? If so, why an election? Why not just flip a coin, or take turns?
- Such righteousness is not just proclaimed – it is practiced. You cannot teach righteousness on Sunday and live wickedly throughout the week – and expect God to honor your Sundays.
- Note well: this is not the self-righteousness that condemns the sinner, but the God-righteousness that condemns the sin.

"While the sun was setting"

Note that Jesus works while there is opportunity to work. God gives opportunity for us to work, and expects us to use it.

- Such an opportunity, by definition, has a starting time. It also has an ending time. He will not be pleased if we spend the time in between debating what to do, waiting to be sure or engaging in analysis paralysis.
- Such work must continue "until sunset." We are not privileged to decide that we can retire from God's work. Such retirement is death – one way or another.
- Is this hard? If you think so, please remember that what you love to do defines who you are. Duty will eventually be cast aside in age; love will not.

"A secluded place"

No soldier can stay on the front lines indefinitely. There must be a time when they are relieved of this duty – and go to prepare and repair. To prepare? To prepare for whatever might come next; to repair whatever has been damaged in the fight.

- Christ sets us the example: he frequently and regularly goes out into a secluded place to seek the Father in prayer.
- He does so even as there are those pressing him to remain and continue healing; so his inner life precedes his outer life.

One thing I have noticed: this is easy to do in time of pain. It is much more difficult in time of triumph – when it is often needed the most.

God's Fellow Workers

We may also take a lesson from those around Jesus, particularly Peter's mother-in-law.

They invite him in

Our homes are our fortresses. It is there we feel we can hide our failings and quirks from the rest of the world. We put a roof on to keep the rain out; we put a door on to keep the world out.

- But the worker of God opens the door of his home – spiritual or physical – to the Lord. If you want to be effective for him, there can be no fortress held against him.

- It is not a grudging entry; it is the invitation of hospitality. For our guests we sacrifice the present, the pleasant and the private; do we do the same for our Lord?
- We *invite* him in. Christ is the perfect gentleman; he stands at the door and knocks. We must bid him welcome.

They bring him to their troubles

Note, not "they bring their troubles to him." There is a difference. When you bring your troubles to Jesus, you are asking him to fix them – and nothing else. When you bring him to your troubles, you are asking him to do what he knows to be the best for you.

That, of course, is a risk. A very large risk indeed. For Jesus may decide that what you thought needed a coat of paint really needs to be torn down and rebuilt. You should expect him to do more than solve the problem; you should expect him to reward such faith with his blessing. He will – if you will trust him completely in this.

They are saved to serve

It is a mercy that we have no record that this woman stood up and began to shout "Glory, Hallelujah." Some of us are blessed – and won't let the rest of the world forget it.

This woman, however, understands what to do with a blessing. She is saved to serve. She knows she cannot repay the blessing given – but she can pass it on to the next person. Being blessed does not make you a plaster saint. We are servants of God, not icons.

Reaction: the people around

Fair warning should be given: acting like a committed Christian does not necessarily produce the reactions you might expect.

Amazed, astounded

It is not just the healing that astounds them; it is the authority in which it is done. It is completely new to them.

- Well, it's not normal. Healing isn't normal. Neither is the degree of charity we are called to have. Nor is the degree of devotion. We're not normal. Get used to it. This can either be a barrier (look at the weirdoes) or a bridge (God loves even me?).
- Remember, this is the church – not the Rotary club. We are not a human organization, but Christ's own creation. We should walk in his power and authority.
- This walk can also provoke resentment. The unrighteous will find us unreasonably uncompromising. The ordinary man will find us marching to the different drummer, and therefore unpredictable. Either way, we will be very uncomfortable to them.

Spread the news

It is a dependable part of the human mind: if it's news, it will spread fast. It's different, noteworthy, weird, odd, quirky – whatever, we will spread it.

Humans, you see, are not only insatiably curious, they love to be in the position of the story teller. We sometimes forget that "gospel" means "good news." When people see it in our lives, the word spreads.

But that has its edge, too. When such news arrives, it obliges the hearer to make a decision. Even the sound of good works causes the reflection, "I wish I was like that." The light comes; the darkness flees.

Seek Him

Ultimately, for those outside the faith, our desire is the same as always: that they might indeed hear the Good News. We often see classes that tell us that we can learn the secrets of spreading the Good News. There is no secret. But there is a guiding principle: lift Him up. If your life exalts Christ, others will know – and know why.

Ultimately, however, we also seek Him. It is a search which draws us ever closer to him, a search which cannot end in this life. But someday – may it be soon, Lord – we shall see him face to face.

Working Faith - Luke 5:1-26

Many years ago, before MTV, little children in Sunday School would sing a song: "I will make you fishers of men, if you follow me." We think of fishing as a recreational sport; Christ knew it was hard work. Working faith; an essential for the Christian.

Fishers of Men

Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and *began* teaching the people from the boat. When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say *and* let down the nets." When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets *began* to break; so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw *that,* he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also *were* James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men." When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.
(Luke 5:1-11 NASB)

The virtue of obedience

We live in a culture that glorifies rebellion. Sergeant York in World War I has given way to the cynical rebelliousness of Dr. Hawkeye Pierce. We are now so attuned to this that your teacher must explicitly state the obvious: obedience to God is a virtue – not a sign of lack of intelligence. We see it here in the disciples:

- Note, please, that the disciples were hard at work cleaning their nets. They know their trade; even though the night's catch was nothing, the nets still need care. Jesus commands Peter to take him out a little way to speak to the crowd. That means Peter, instead of tending to his business, must sit and listen. Often our questions of obedience are like this – not good versus evil, but good versus best. The right response is to ask the Lord's will – and follow it.
- Such obedience is shown in one word: "Master." The word in the original means one who is entitled to give orders – a commander. So often we are pleased to call Jesus "savior"; it pleases us to think of him as "friend." But do we really call him "Master?"
- Peter, being an honest man, feels it only fair to warn the Lord that they've been out all night and caught nothing. The Man, after all, is a carpenter; what would he know about fishing? (Perhaps it's fish he knew; he created them.) Then come the words of obedience: "I will do as you say." I may not understand; I may think I have a better idea; I may think this just won't work – but I will do as you say.

If we would only obey! The old hymn taught us to "trust and obey." We want the blessings of faith without the humility of obedience.

God's providence

The result of such obedience is the providence of God – he fills the net to overflowing. What can we learn here?

- God's providence fills the net. But somebody has to row the boat and let the net down and haul it up again. God expects us to do our own work; we are co-laborers with him.
- Of course, once the catch comes in, Peter reacts (as Isaiah did) just as if he had found a ticking time bomb. How little is our faith! But see again the virtue of obedience: because he obeyed, he saw the power of God revealed to him.
- There's a lesson in here: when God tells you to go fishing, expect to catch a lot of fish. His providence is given for his work; if you are fighting the good fight, you will never lack for ammunition and supplies.

"Follow me"

Here is the call in its simplicity: follow me. We can see in this call the blessings and perils of the call today:

- That huge catch is a two edged sword. You can look at it as evidence that God will provide. It is also evidence that there are still a lot of fish left in the lake. You must choose to leave the fish; he will not force you.
- The call gives no roadmap. Indeed, the first thing Christ tells them to do is to put out into deep water. Where? Only God knows. His call is not to a route or a system, but to a guide.
- Indeed, the call is intensely personal. It is personal in that it is for you, personally. No one else will receive the call quite like you will. Your reaction is personal too; no one else can serve him quite like you can.

Cleansing the leper

It seems like an interlude, something just stuck in along the way.

While He was in one of the cities, behold, *there was* a man covered with leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately the leprosy left him. And He ordered him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."
(Luke 5:12-14 NASB)

Humility before God

There is a frequent connection here: the greater your needs might be, the more humbly you must approach God. We often reverse this; in our times of great need we go to God in our self-importance, telling him that he should do great things for us. This comes of not knowing who God really is. Such a misconception puts iron bars on our faith, keeping it from growing as our pride shrinks.

Do you see it here? There is no sense of this man making a bargain with Jesus. He does not promise to spread Christ's fame; he does not promise anything. He came to beg his healing, not to bargain down the doctor's fee. Indeed, he makes the public gesture of humility common in his time: he falls down before him and puts his face to the ground. Then he begs.

The will of God

"If" – a powerful word in our language. This man recognizes the main point: his healing depends upon the will of God.

- We must remember that we are dealing with the will of God, not our own will. No matter how much we want, it's his will that counts.
- We must also remember that it's his will. We are not dealing with some heathen god who automatically reacts to our sacrifices; we are dealing with the ultimate person.

But there is no sense asking God for anything without faith. The man acknowledges that his healing can be accomplished – both by his words and by his actions. But will Christ act?

There is only one thing of which we can be certain here: the will of God is intrinsically bound into his character. If we ask that which is contrary to his character, we court rejection and worse. But if we ask on the basis of his character, we ask him to do his will – in us.

Conforming to the law

It may seem curious: Jesus commands the man to make the sacrifices associated with his cleansing, as prescribed in the Old Testament. This is not an afterthought, but an essential part of Christ's personality as well.

- He does this so as to keep the man faithful. To omit these sacrifices would, in his time, defile his conscience.
- It is also good practice. Only those who are acting in obedience can sustain the obedient mind so pleasing to God.
- Through this we see the harmony of the Old Testament with the New Testament – God's will is a part of his eternal nature.

Through the roof

But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear *Him* and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray. One day He was teaching; and there were *some* Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting *there,* who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and *from* Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was *present* for Him to perform healing. And *some* men *were* carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in and to set him down in front of Him. But not finding any *way* to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle *of the crowd,* in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this *man* who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? "But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"--He said to the paralytic--"I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home." Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God. They were all struck with astonishment and *began* glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen remarkable things today." (Luke 5:15-26 NASB)

The mission of Christ – and the Christian

In any great work, it helps immensely to know the main point of the business. The crowds came to see the famous rabbi, to see if he would perform some miracle of healing. People still do that today; they come to God's church to be healed of whatever disaster they have made of their lives. It is tempting for the church to become some sort of walk-in psychological self-help center. But it is not our mission.

Christ came to this place to teach; that was his purpose there. Healing was not his purpose; merely his credential. The church must remember that we are here to seek and save the lost, not just to say, "there, there."

This includes our preparation as well. Christ went into the desert to pray before he came to teach. He kept his inner life with the Father; it precedes his works. This is an example to us: the life of prayer, meditation and study is the necessary precursor to the work of faith. Without it, we will burn out like a skyrocket when we should be a candle set on a hill, for all to see.

The nature of faith

If you think about it, it is really astounding: God allows our faith to be the source of healing for others. Intercession is an amazing privilege; the king of kings, the lord of lords, the creator of all things created allows us to approach him in petition for those around us.

He expects us to do so, in fact. Indeed, he expects us to do so under adverse circumstances. For example:

- These men find a physical obstacle in their way – the crowd. Obstacles do not dismay a man of faith; they are simply facts to be dealt with.
- One such an obstacle is social convention – the politeness needed. Would a good Christian tear up someone else's roof?
- Indeed, faith without works is dead. If our faith does not result in action, how is it really faith?

True Authority

But faith in what? Many will preach that faith itself will move mountains – that this is the nature of faith. This is not what Scripture teaches. Faith is powerful because it reaches out to the one who is omnipotent. Christ shows that power here, and in so doing demonstrates his authority over sin. The argument is relatively simple:

- Only the one offended can forgive the offense. When we sin, God is the one offended. Therefore, he can forgive. He can also do this in a perfect way. When we forgive, we usually find ourselves forgiving each other. God needs no forgiveness, but is generous in forgiving.
- Therefore, if I claim to be able to forgive sins in general, I am claiming to be God. Such a claim needs evidence, to say the least.
- The evidence is before their eyes. No one but God could do such healing; God would not permit a blasphemer to do so. There is only one possible conclusion. None of the prophets did this; none of the priests; only God. Therefore, this must be God in the flesh.

Christ's forgiveness

See, then, how Christ gives this forgiveness: gently. There is no sense here that the man is not a sinner. On the contrary, he is forgiven, which means that he certainly is a sinner. But Christ does not recite his sins; rather, in response to his faith, he forgives without embarrassing him.

In so doing he has not solved all the man's problems. He has put an end to the disease – but not to the struggle with sin. This is why Christ often tells people to "go and sin no more."

Summary

We are called to be fishers of men, in simple obedience to his, "Follow me." He is the Holy One; we must therefore keep ourselves in humility, knowing that it is his grace that saves us. We are just passing on the Good News. In so doing, we must have working faith – faith that genuinely knows that God can and will act – and faith that results in our action as well.

The Call of Christ - Luke 5:27-39

It is a phrase of which we hear very little these days: "the call of Christ." The church, it seems, would not dream of placing such a burden upon its members. Sometimes we forget that the church is the ultimate reality, the mind of God, in our increasingly unreal world. Let us turn to the Scriptures:

After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me." And he left everything behind, and got up and *began* to follow Him. And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other *people* who were reclining *at the table* with them. The Pharisees and their scribes *began* grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "*It is* not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the *disciples* of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink." And Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? "But *the* days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days." And He was also telling them a parable: "No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. "But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. "And no one, after drinking old *wine* wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good *enough*.'"
(Luke 5:27-39 NASB)

The Authority of Christ

We may begin this section by carefully examining that which is acknowledged, and that which is not. The authority of Christ over the righteousness seems obvious; what about his authority over sinners? We are told that all authority is given to Him; does that include sinners as well? Matthew's example here will serve us well.

Authority over the righteous

We would concede Christ's authority over the righteous as given. It is worth some ink, however, to discover the root of that authority. Let's take it step by step:

- The authority of Christ – over the righteous or anything else – is personal. He did not inherit a position; God gave him the authority personally. But that raises the question: just why should the righteous obey Him?
- The answer is equally simple. Jesus is God in the flesh; therefore, like God the Father, we may say that He *is* righteousness (and thank you, Thomas Aquinas). He is what they are.
- Therefore, his authority over the righteous is absolute. A point which has been greatly neglected lately – and is the foundation of obedience.

Authority over sinners

But what about sinners? We know that the sinful will be judged at his return; does he have authority over them now? Again, his authority is personal:

- He is the atonement. As such, He is mercy; which is to say, God is love.

- As is shown in the last passage, he has authority over sin. Because he is the very mercy of God, he has that same personal authority over sinners. He is entitled to their obedience too.
- Thus his authority over sinners is absolute too. He is THE Way; both for the righteous and the sinners.

We may now see that in action, in Matthew's call.

The call of Matthew

It is important for us to see that Christ's authority over sinners is used in the way God intended: he is called the Friend of Sinners. It is not his desire to destroy the sinner, but to redeem him.

There is a subtlety in the original Greek which escapes the English language. It says that Christ "noticed" Levi (other translations use "saw.") The word actually means "to examine closely." The call to Levi (Matthew; that's his Greek name; Levi is Jewish) is not a bulk mailer or a spam e-mail; it is, like His authority, personal. Jesus is not drafting people into an army; he is wooing them into the kingdom of God.

Matthew's reaction shows us one thing: he who is forgiven much, loves much. Love calls to the dirtiest of sinners, and is echoed with love.

The Nature of the Call

We hear so little preached on the call of Christ that we should review its major points again:

The call is personal

The call is from the person, Jesus, to each of us – ordinary human persons. Please note that this is not simply an order to the lower ants from the ant on the top of the ant heap. Indeed, it is made on the personal authority of the only man who seriously could claim to be God in the flesh. We miss the mark if we do not see the Son of Man.

In a passage such as this, we can see the person – and why he upset the establishment so much. Dorothy Sayers put it this way:

> The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused Him of being a bore -- on the contrary; they thought Him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround Him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him "meek and mild" and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.
>
> To those who knew him, however, He in no way suggested a milk-and-water person; they objected to Him as a dangerous firebrand. True, He was tender to the unfortunate, patient with honest inquirers, and humble before Heaven; but He insulted respectable clergymen by calling them hypocrites; He referred to King Herod as "that fox"; He went to parties in disreputable company and was looked upon as "gluttonous man and winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners"; He assaulted indignant tradesmen and threw them and their belongings out of the Temple; He drove a coach-and-horses through a number of sacrosanct and hoary regulations; He cured diseases by any means that came handy, with a shocking casualness in the matter of other people's pigs and property; He showed no proper deference for wealth or social position; when confronted with neat dialectical traps, He displayed a paradoxical humor that affronted serious-

minded people, and He retorted by asking disagreeably searching questions that could not be answered by rule of thumb.

He was emphatically not a dull man in his human lifetime, and if He was God, there can be nothing dull about God either. But He had "a daily beauty in His life that made us ugly," and officialdom felt that the established order of things would be more secure without Him. So they did away with God in the name of peace and quietness.

This is the man; a man whose personal presence suspends the ordinary rules of life. Why don't his disciples fast? Because He is who He is. This extraordinary man, whose feet got dirty like ours do, is the one who calls us. It's personal; and he wants all of our personality.

The call is purposeful

Note the phrasing: "I have come to call…" This tells us two things. First, that the call is no accident or spur of the moment thing; it is purposeful. It also tells us that it is a call, not a demand. There is no sense of force involved; "softly and tenderly Jesus is calling."

We, the church, have that same call. It is our purpose, our mission, to make disciples. We do this by preaching the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. We are to make disciples. This too is purposeful; it is indeed the purpose of God since the beginning of time.

The call is powerful

It would certainly seem that the call of Christ is powerful indeed. This is the one who heals the sick and raises the dead. We often think that since his call is powerful, ours must be weak. It is not so. Jesus told his disciples[28] that it was good for him to leave – so that the Holy Spirit would come. Jesus is the atonement; we are the ambassadors of reconciliation. Through us, others may become the sons of God. That is power indeed.

Our response

The call is made to us. Each of us hears it somewhat differently, for there are many gifts of the Spirit. I submit for your consideration three varieties of response.

The First Comfortable Church

The economists have an illustration which will serve. Sometimes we act like "the last man on the blimp." It's as if the blimp is hovering overhead while those below face rising flood waters. The blimp lowers a rope ladder, and the flood victims begin to climb to the blimp. But the blimp can only hold so many people, or it will crash into the flood waters. As each person makes it up to the blimp, he must decide: should I be the one to cut loose the rope ladder? Who will decide to be the last person in the blimp?

Many of us feel like that. We're members of the First Comfortable Church; we've made it into God's blimp. We don't want any more, for more would change things – and we like things as they are. So how do we cut the ladder? In our acceptance or rejection of the next person in the door. If the next

[28] John 16:7

person is wearing a Harley motorcycle jacket and boots, we convey the subtle impression that this church is composed of more civilized people; come back when you learn how to wear a tie.

Now, truth to tell, we wouldn't want this attitude to become well known. We like to think that we're a friendly church here at First Comfortable. The Pharisees in this illustration understand that too. Notice that they don't complain to Jesus – the claws on the Lion of Judah are too well known. They complain to the disciples. We wouldn't complain to the pastor about the latest crop of riff-raff to come to the church; but we might just discuss it amongst ourselves.

Hating the sin, loving the sinner

The example given here is a powerful one. We cannot in any sense say that Christ approved of the tax collectors – by and large they were a collection of sinners. The issue is not their sin; the issue is Christ's love for them. If you love someone, should you not share the good news of Jesus Christ?

Under certain circumstances we are permitted to "pass judgment" – it's called church discipline. But it always has as its object the repentance (thus benefit) of the sinner in question. Indeed, it is an example of loving your neighbor.

The attitude of love may seem to be difficult. But consider: you have no real difficulty in loving yourself. Jesus only asks that you do likewise for your neighbor.

The example of Matthew

Matthew (Levi) provides us the example here. See what the call cost him:

- It cost him his fortune – he was a rich man. Being a tax collector didn't give you social status, but it did make you rich.
- It cost him his hours – the man who used to command his day must now wait and see what his Master will do with those hours.
- It cost him his thought – he leave the familiar world of tax laws and polite extortion and enters the world where he is a beginner.
- It cost him his passions – he goes from despising his victims (not without envying their social status) to treating them like brothers.
- It cost him his pride – which he gave up in full sacrificial rites by inviting his friends over to meet his new Master.

The call of Christ: it is based on his personal authority; it is a powerful call, yet unique to you. Will you politely put it aside? Or will you see the hurting and needy around you?

We know very little else about Matthew than what is recorded in this passage. It is the only example Matthew sets for us – but it is an impressive one. He forsook all, took up the cross, and followed his Master.

Lord of the Sabbath - Luke 6:1-16

No drama is complete without the villain; so we have the Pharisees ever at Jesus' side, waiting to accuse him. A man is often measured not by his words or deeds, but by what he has overcome. It is fitting, then, that the enemies of Christ are armed with the Law, given by God to Moses.

Lord of the Sabbath

Now it happened that He was passing through *some* grainfields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating *the grain.* But some of the Pharisees said, "Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?" And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."
(Luk 6:1-5 NASB)

The Law of Moses

We need to be particularly clear here, as times have changed. It is now the law in California that picking fruit, grain or vegetables out of the farmers field as you pass by is considered a crime. It was not always so; this law originated in the Great Depression, when the growers complained of so many Okies coming through that whole orchards were picked clean. Before then, most of America followed the laws given in the Old Testament:

- First, any traveler was entitled to help himself[29] – by hand, not with a blade. The intent was that the hungry traveler should be shown hospitality, a virtue even in our day.
- Next, the fields and orchards were to be harvested once, and even then not all the produce was to be gathered.[30] This was so that the poor might be able to feed themselves without the humiliation of begging.

Hospitality and charity were required. In this instance, scholars hold that the grain in question would probably be barley (judging by the time of the year). What the disciples did was in accordance with Mosaic Law – barring this question of the Sabbath.

Concerning the Sabbath

We must understand the purpose of the Sabbath if we are to understand the argument made.

- The Sabbath, the seventh day of the week (Saturday), was a day of rest. Genesis tells us that God, in creation, rested on the seventh day. The point may be considered important; the Sabbath is mentioned over 60 times in the Old Testament.
- To the Jew of this time, the Sabbath would be spent in the synagogue, listening to the teaching from the Law.

In short, this is a law of God, given for the benefit of men. The benefit is both the rest and the instruction.

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[29] Deuteronomy 23:25
[30] Leviticus 19:9-10

To see the importance of this, we must remember that the Jews held that the Law was greater than life. It was assumed that a devout Jew would die any death rather than violate the Law of Moses, and history gives us several examples of this. The point has not much changed in our time; for example, husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church – giving his life for it.[31]

Indeed, the point is applicable to one and all. Martin Luther King once remarked that if a man had nothing worth dying for, he had nothing worth living for. To the Jews, the Law was worth dying for. The matter in their eyes is extremely serious.

The claim of Christ

If the Law is greater than life, we must also consider that God is greater than the Law. So even the legalist would concede that God may sanction exceptions to the Sabbath. Indeed, such exceptions are recorded; the priests find their busiest work on the Sabbath, for example.[32] As such, these regulations may be set aside for the purposes of God.

We used to understand this well in America. Before the great spiritual decline it was common to have "blue laws" – ordinances which prohibited most businesses from opening on Sunday. Exceptions were made for certain activities such as hospitals. The practical point is the one Christ gives here: the blue laws encouraged a day of rest and a day of devotion to God. The example Christ gives – of David and the bread of the presence – is a similar situation. You see the point: the blue laws were designed for the benefit of the citizenry; exceptions were made for those things with higher purposes.

So we may ask, then, what higher purposes are present to allow such activity? The answer is startling and simple: the Son of Man is present. The Law may be greater than life, but God is greater than the Law. And God the Son is present.

He proclaims his lordship over the Sabbath. We may see this in three tests which have not lost their usefulness today:

- He is Lord over regulations – even those we impose on ourselves. Does his Lordship transcend the boundaries of our "comfort zone?"
- He is Lord over the good gifts given to man – for he is their giver.[33] Do we use those good gifts – our talents, for example – for him?
- He is Lord over the teachings of men, even pious and holy men.[34]

Here is a man whose very presence - the I Am – overrides the rules given in the Law. It is no wonder his opponents feared and hated him; he challenges their right to rule. His challenge is not by force – but by the power they claim, the power of God.

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[31] Ephesians 5:25
[32] Christ uses this example in the parallel accounts.
[33] James 1:17
[34] One is reminded of the (apocryphal, I hope) church bylaws which read that "the will of God cannot be overturned except by a two thirds vote of the board of elders."

Mandatory Goodness

We may see the next round in the argument here:

On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely *to see* if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find *reason* to accuse Him. But He knew what they were thinking, and He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" And he got up and came forward. And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?" After looking around at them all, He said to him, "Stretch out your hand!" And he did *so;* and his hand was restored. But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.
(Luk 6:6-11 NASB)

Asking the Right Questions

For those of you who consider yourself a professional of some sort, I submit to you that your mastery of that profession came in three steps:

- First, you did everything by the rules, at someone's direction. Everything was black and white; you followed the steps.
- After that came a time when you understood the principles of your craft, and you applied them consistently. The rules were still there, but mostly as an example. You did not bother being consistent with the rules, but were consistent with the principles.
- Finally – if you truly master a craft – you come to the point where you are so capable that others begin to see that you are actually building up the craft by your creative power. You still work within the principles, but you develop new ways of doing so.

May I submit to you that this is a good picture of what should have happened to the Jews of this time? Moses taught them the rules. In their rebellious experience against God, he sent them prophets to bring them to an understanding of who He is. Finally, the time of mastery arrives – the time of Christ.

The Pharisees should, by this time, have mastered at least the second step, and should have longed for the third. It is important to see why they did not:

- First, because the legalism engendered in the rules provides a comfort to those who will not desire to grow.
- Second, if practiced long enough, it engenders a pride that is very fierce.

So the question comes to us: are we growing in God? Or are we stuck with the rules? Are we ready to be inconsistent to everything and everyone but God?

Doing good

- One of America's early Puritan theologians, Cotton Mather, put it this way: "The ability to do good imposes an obligation to do it." The principle is found throughout the Bible. For example[35], if you see your *enemy's* ox wandering about, you are to return it to him. From this (in the parallel passages) Christ argues that you would do this for your own ox on a Sabbath – and therefore you are not relieved of this obligation even if it's the Sabbath.

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[35] Deuteronomy 23:4

It is a distinct point of Christian theology that it is positive in nature. The command is not "don't do what you don't want done to you" but rather do unto others… The Good Samaritan evidences this teaching as well. We condemn those who walked on by and praise the one who stopped to help. By this judgment we judge ourselves.

There is a simple reason for this: faith without works is dead.[36] This was certainly modeled by Jesus. It is interesting to consider the difference it would have made if Jesus had refused to heal on the Sabbath. But this could not be, for mercy triumphs over judgment, love never fails.

The Great Divide

One thing is clear: the presence of Jesus divides the sheep and the goats. There is no middle ground. Indeed, he told us that he came not to bring peace, but a sword.[37] It is not easy, sometimes, to tell which side is which. But there is a pair of clues given here which may help us discern the righteous from the imitation:

- First, the Pharisees go away in a rage – not the behavior of one who loves his enemies.
- Second, they begin to plot with the Herodians. These are the secular humanists of their day; for the righteous, this is an alliance with evil. There can be no alliance between evil and the kingdom of God.

Reaction to hatred: prayer

It may strike you as curious: Jesus, who needed prayer the least, is the most frequent in it.

> It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; and Matthew and Thomas; James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; Judas *the son* of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.
> (Luk 6:12-16 NASB)

This is not just to set an example for us, though it is that. Jesus is fully man, and man benefits from prayer. But in this particular instance we can gain a great deal by watching Jesus pray:

- Note that he prays through the night – the time of silence in the land without modern lighting.
- See, too, that he prays alone – away from the distractions of other people, no matter how needy. It sounds pious to say that one is so busy in good works that there is no time to pray. It is also quite false.
- Note that he prays all night. This is not the "sweet minute-and-a-half of prayer" but the long, solid conversation with the living God.
- This is a prayer which befits the occasion. His enemies are in a rage about him – so at this time he selects his apostles. Great decisions need great prayer.

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[36] James 2:17
[37] Matthew 10:34

It strikes us a curious that he calls his apostles in a time of trial, but that is the way of God. When the forces of the world are at their most furious, the power of God calls forth his saints. I cannot forbear two questions:

- Are we in such a time?
- Is he calling you?

The Sermon on the Plain - Luke 6:17-49

In some systems of interpretation of the Bible this passage is to be harmonized with the Sermon on the Mount. It seems somehow undignified for Christ to repeat himself (which, of course, he did – for example, every time he encountered the Pharisees). Is it not much more likely that his message was the same in different places, tailored to the ears of the hearers? As such, this passage can stand alone – and be of great benefit to our ears too.

The Paradox of Wealth

Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place; and *there was* a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were being cured. And all the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing *them* all. And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He *began* to say, "Blessed *are* you *who are* poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed *are* you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed *are* you who weep now, for you shall laugh. "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. "Be glad in that day and leap *for joy*, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. "But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. "Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe *to you* who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. "Woe *to you* when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.
(Luk 6:17-26 NASB)

Wealth as God's favor

The Bible sometimes seems to be very ambivalent towards wealth. For example, we can see this attitude in Proverbs:

- Wealth is said to be given by God.[38]
- It is said to be a blessing given to the righteous.[39]
- Indeed, if wealth be condemned, how can we reconcile that with Paul's instructions on what the wealthy are to do with their money?[40]

So we see the common opinion of the time of Christ: wealth is the visible sign of God's favor upon you.

Wealth seen as wickedness

Of course, this wealth can be looked at as the result of evil.

- James condemns the wealthy in no uncertain terms, and warns of their imminent punishment.[41]
- We are told that ill-gotten wealth will somehow wind up in the hands of the generous – who will distribute it.[42]

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[38] Proverbs 10:22
[39] Proverbs 15:6
[40] 1 Timothy 6:17-19
[41] James 5:1-5
[42] Proverbs 28:8

- Indeed, riches pursued by evil means are said to be a mist, a vapor.[43]

So how do we reconcile these views?

No reliance on riches

The key seems to be this: place no reliance on wealth; it is not to be trusted for your security.[44]

- In particular, we are not to "weary" ourselves about riches – it's not worth the doing.[45]
- One very good reason for that: they are of no use on the Day of Wrath.[46] When our Lord returns, does it matter what's in your checking account? Perhaps he will look at how you spent it instead!

So why, then, do riches have such a bad reputation? Part of this must be our envy of the rich; there is also a sound basis as well. The question is not how much money you have but how much you love it. As Paul tells us, the love of money is the root of much evil.[47]

Balance Points

Like much else, we must reach a balance point if we are to do as God desires. We are in the world but not of the world, and our attitude towards wealth should show that.

- We need to realize that wealth is not as important as some other things – such as harmony in the family.[48]
- We need to remember the lesson of the Rich Young Ruler[49] - that sometimes our money gets between us and God.
- Finally, we must recognize that God wants us to have the right amount of wealth suitable for us – and we should desire this as well.[50]

Loving Your Enemies

Christ, having tackled the subject of wealth and happiness (and undoubtedly dismayed many of his hearers) goes on to tackle the common problem of vengefulness – the burning desire to justify ourselves, to get even, to pay back the wrongs we've been done. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord, and for us to take vengeance is to steal from Him. What, then, are we to do?

"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. "Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. "Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners love those who love them. "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners do the same. "If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is *that* to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same *amount.* "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in

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[43] Proverbs 21:6
[44] Proverbs 11:28
[45] Proverbs 23:4-5
[46] Proverbs 11:14
[47] 1 Timothy 6:10
[48] Proverbs 15:16-17
[49] Matthew 19:16-26
[50] Proverbs 30:8-9

return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men.* "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, *and* running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."
(Luk 6:27-38 NASB)

Counterintuitive

The passage, at first glance, makes no sense. Look what Christ is telling you to do for (not to!) your enemies:

- In the realm of physical things you are to do good to those who hate you. This does have the advantage of being completely unexpected. It will puzzle them mightily. It's just that it puzzles us too. But it is commanded, so we had best get to it.
- In the realm of things spoken, we are to bless them. This also sounds hard, but consider: how many people are genuinely so evil that you cannot find something good to say about them, or something to praise in their conduct? The evil in others is quick to be seen; the good may take some searching.
- Finally this: of all things the strangest, that we should go before the throne of grace, to the ruler of all things, the Creator Himself, and intercede on their behalf!

You will be surprised how effective that last one is. God hears it so seldom that he is quick to reward it. But we would be of angelic virtue if we failed to ask – "WHY?"

Why you would do such a thing

We can, perhaps, see the virtue of forgiving our enemies after we thrash them into submission. It feels good to have your enemy begging for mercy, and even better to think yourself magnanimous for granting it. But why would you do this in any other circumstance?

First, it distinguishes you from those who are of the world. The world says you should look out for number one. Such people, even being evil, are quite capable of doing good things for their friends. It often happens that such good deeds are also profitable for the doer – eventually. The trap is this: because you bless your friends, you think you're being righteous. But you're not. You're being ordinary.

God understands that this will be strange to you – so he promises to reward you for it. You might think that this would be sufficient; but look around and see just how often you find Christians loving their enemies. Why?

- We have so stressed that Jesus is "just like us" (in that he is human) that we don't think he *will* reward us.
- We have made Jesus into "our buddy" – and therefore we do not believe that he *can* reward us.

We classify his promise under "pie in the sky" and go about our daily business of paying back who we can, when we can. Do not be deceived in this; Christ meant what he said. Indeed, it is worse than that for us.

The yardstick principle

God is just. The way we treat others (including our enemies) is the way he plans on treating us. If we are in payback mode, then he will see to it that we are paid back for all the evil done by us to our enemies – no matter how righteous we thought we were. Indeed, he extends the principle here:

- It applies to judgment and condemnation, too. Often our enemies are so powerful (or impersonal) that we have no power to repay them. But our hearts can judge and condemn them! Remember, it's our yardstick.
- The same applies to pardon, as well. If we will not pardon, if we will not be merciful, why should God be? It is no use saying, "they deserved it." Likely enough they did. Do you want what you deserve – from the hands of Almighty God? Or were you looking for mercy?
- Just so you will know he expects more than lip service, notice how he extends this principle to giving! It is not just to our friends, but indeed to our enemies that we are to be charitable.

The Imitation of Christ

And He also spoke a parable to them: "A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher. "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. "For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. "For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil *man* out of the evil *treasure* brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? "Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. "But the one who has heard and has not acted *accordingly*, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great."
(Luk 6:39-49 NASB)

Jesus puts it to us this way: suppose you were looking for a teacher to provide you with wisdom for your life. What would you look for?

- If you were blind, you wouldn't want a guide dog that was blind, would you? No, you'd want a dog that could see well and was obedient to its training.
- Similarly, if you want wisdom for living, would you pick a pompous hypocrite (usually with a Ph. D.)? Often the jargon is a cover for the lack of real experience in wisdom.

I cannot forbear a story. When I was much younger, I was a teacher at Beverly Hills High School. I had a student in one of my classes whose behavior was not satisfactory; I had to take significant action to correct this. He told me that his dad was a big man in Beverly Hills, and I'd be hearing from him. Sure enough, the next day there was a message to call Mr. Bigshot.

It took six telephone operators to get through to him; when I got there I was convinced that here was a man of power. He asked me to tell him my side of things. I began to spew forth the jargon taught in education classes, hoping to impress him with my knowledge as a teacher. It didn't work. He listened patiently for a few moments, then interrupted me with: "Excuse me, but what you really mean is that the kid is too big for his britches, right?"

"Yes sir, that's exactly what I mean."

"I thought so; I'll take care of it." He did, too!

- Finally, you wouldn't pick someone to teach you wisdom whose life didn't show it. When you were young, you probably had a football or baseball hero. Nobody picks their hero from the second string on the bench. How much more should you pick your example for life?

  Of course, the message is clear: do you pick the pious hypocrite or the living Christ?

Results of obedience

It's no good selecting a teacher and example unless you do what you are taught. We rightly look at those who proclaim Jesus as Lord but live as if he didn't exist as being hypocrites. The key, however, is to look at ourselves and ask if we aren't guilty of the same things.

Make no mistake: the rains will come. If you proclaim yourself a follower of Jesus Christ, the test will happen. Things will arise which will make your Christianity very inconvenient. If you give up and give in, the next phase is the flood – the time of trial which reveals that you really didn't mean what you said. Your life will crumble, and all will see it.

So often we think we shall escape this; it is not so. He told us that by our fruits men will know us. They will also know us when the flood waters rise.

Authority and Faith - Luke 7:1-10

Note: the account differs somewhat between Matthew and Luke. There are various ways of harmonizing the two texts; this is not of concern in this particular study. Both passages are listed so that we may see all the details.

Matthew 8:5-13	Luke 7:1-10
And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." Jesus *said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does *it.*" Now when Jesus heard *this,* He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that *very* moment. (Mat 8:5-13 NASB)	When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum. And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave. When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue." Now Jesus *started* on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but *just* say the word, and my servant will be healed. "For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health. (Luk 7:1-10 NASB)

Preliminaries

There are a few things which are not familiar to us today which bear upon this story.

- The servant (or slave) suffers from palsy. This description covered a number of diseases, but it would not be unfair to compare it with conditions like cerebral palsy.
- Key to understanding the centurion's behavior is this: for a devout Jew to enter into a gentile's house is to become unclean. Even to touch a Gentile was held to make one unclean.
- There was, at the time, a recognized class of God-fearing Gentiles. They did not become circumcised and convert, but honored, respected and followed the moral law found in the Old Testament.

- Jesus, the Messiah, was sent to the house of Israel. In his adult ministry, he did not leave the boundaries of ancient Israel. For him to deal with a gentile would be thought very strange.

Harmony

As noted above, the two passages appear to conflict if taken word for word. There are various harmonies; it is also possible that all the details of both accounts happened. More to the point, it's not very important to our understanding.

The reaction of Christ

- Only twice does Christ commend someone for great faith; here, and the episode of the Canaanite woman.[51] We can learn from this.
- First, Christ marvels at his faith. We are accustomed to the idea that God knows everything, therefore Christ should never be surprised. Perhaps he wasn't – but he was certainly impressed.
- Next, he sets this man before us as an example of great faith. Therefore, the man's character and actions are worthy of our time.
- Finally, in Matthew's account, he warns that those whose faith consists of lip service will not fare well in the Day of Judgment – especially when there are men like this centurion.

Let us look, therefore, at the elements of this man's confidence in Christ.

Faith, humility and thoughtfulness

Faith

First, let us look directly at the type of faith this man had.

- It is a faith *of the mind.* We are well acquainted with the type of preaching which proclaims that God wants your heart, therefore check your brain at the door. But this man's faith is entirely intellectual; he has never met Christ in person. All he knows about him would come from the occasional person whom Jesus healed. No doctrine but the Old Testament would be known to him. It's all in his head, no experience directly.
- It is a faith buttressed by *practice*. This comes in two ways. First, he is in the habit of obedience, something now ignored (if not scorned). It is his lifestyle. So we see that he says "say the word" – because he understands what it is to take orders.
- There is one word which gives away his entire thought process. He says, "For I *also* am a man placed under authority." Do you see it? He knows that Jesus, the Christ, is a man placed under authority. Whose authority? No doubt: the God of the Old Testament. Once this conclusion is reached, the rest is logical and obvious.

One more thing: notice that it is the faith of the centurion which is being examined here – but the healing is for his servant. Often our prayers and petitions show more faith when we are interceding for others.

Humility

At first glance it might appear that this man is anything but humble. After all, he sent those Jewish elders, didn't he? But remember this: he is a conqueror in a land which despises him. It is indeed unusual to build a synagogue for the Jews in those circumstances, but we can imagine political

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[51] Matthew 15:22-28

expediency in doing it. Herod was no angel, but he rebuilt the Temple. This man, however, has such a reputation among the local Jews that the elders of the synagogue come to Jesus. This is no doubt at his request, but see their approach. Knowing that Jesus (in their minds, a rabbi) is Jewish, they approach him on the grounds that "he is worthy." He's done us a lot of favors, he's a good guy, please help him. Jesus readily agrees. Whether or not any of us are worthy is topic for discussion, but this man seems to be one for whom intercession could easily be made.

Next, however, he sends some friends to talk to the man. It sounds rather pompous to say that I'm not worthy to have you under my roof. Remember, however, that in these days providing hospitality to a traveler was considered an honor; the traveler selected my home above all others.

Just to make it clear, the man himself comes out to meet Jesus and repeats those words. Note one thing: he did not bring the servant out of the house to Jesus. Such is his confidence in Jesus, such is his humility, that he asks simply that the Man says the word.

Thoughtfulness

We have already seen the man's thoughtfulness in the building of the synagogue. Perhaps he was one who loved righteousness. But do you not also see it in his care for his servant? Slaves were throwaway people in those days. We may conclude from Christ's remarks that the man's interest in his slave was not purely one of avoiding financial loss. This, obviously, is a commander who cares for his men. Such men love greatly and are greatly loved.

We can also see his thoughtfulness for Jesus. He would spare this rabbi the distance to his home. More than that, he understood that Jesus would become unclean by entering his home, and he would spare him that. He is one who would not defile another man's conscience. This is all the more touching in that Jesus' first reaction is that he will go and heal the man. Even after the offer, even after Jesus is practically at his front door, his thoughtfulness and care for others are prominent.

Faithful, humble, thoughtful – a trio of virtues which would grace any man.

Faith and Authority

The fascinating thing about the account of the Canaanite woman is her humility; the fascinating thing here is the centurion's grasp of authority and its relationship to faith. How is this grasp of authority related to faith?

Authority by human example

We need to understand a small bit of the nature of authority.

- First, despite our "question authority" mentality, we live most of our lives by authority, We take the doctor's authority in medical matters; we move over for the fire truck roaring to a fire. We take the very existence of, say, Bangladesh by authority (have you ever been there?) So authority is something quite common in our lives, in various forms.
- Second, when used righteously and truthfully, authority is for our benefit. The doctor is for our healing, the fireman to rescue us, the policeman to eliminate the thieves and crooks.

- Third, the proper response to authority is submission.[52] We are first to be obedient, second to be cooperative, third to be helpful and finally we are to make their task a joy.
- If authority is to work correctly, it must match exactly with responsibility and power. If any of these is discordant, then things don't work well.
- All this must be tempered with the idea of stewardship – sinners are given stewardship and must give account of their actions. Only the sinless are given dominion.

The authority of Christ

It sounds a bit obvious, but the same can be said of the authority given Christ. First we must see that all authority begins with God the Father – it is his universe, he created it. But he has given that authority to Christ the Son.[53] Therefore we can apply those principles to the authority of Christ. His authority is completed; it is for our benefit (indeed, our salvation) and the proper response to it is submission.

This, I submit, is an example of the perfection of God, whom the theologians assure is the sum of all perfections. For in Christ is all authority, and in him is also all responsibility – he who is the sustainer of all things in heaven and on earth. To this end he has all power; thus this trio is shown in perfection. Our response is in obedience.

But do you not see that the perfection of faith must carry with it the perfection of obedience? The centurion understood this; he gave orders, he took orders, and things worked when the obedience to those orders was perfect. But our obedience is often far from perfect. Only those who believe, obey – but only those who obey, can believe.[54]

Levels of faith and obedience

I submit that faith, as it grows in Christians, goes through various stages. Here is one schema of such stages. See if you can place yourself anywhere in these:

- There is *grudging* faith. God is out there, but of no particular importance to me. And by the way, he's not doing a very good job of running the universe – because I'm not getting what I want. Every now and then I give him some advice, and call it prayer.
- There is *firehouse* faith. The crisis has arrived, and suddenly I'm a real prayer warrior. I'm bargaining with God every step along the way: if you get me out of this, I'll be soooooo good. God is a little more real – but still not really part of my daily life.
- There is *dutiful* faith. Usually found in those raised in the church, it tells me to be in church every Sunday, unless I'm someplace else. I pray regularly – before meals, in church, and for a sweet minute before bed.
- There is *open eyes* faith. This is the faith of one who has seen what the Lord can and will do – and has begun to desire more of it. It's a faith that wants "more for me." But it's also a faith that

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[52] Obey your leaders and submit *to them,* for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

(Hebrews 13:17 NASB)

[53] Matthew 28:18

[54] Dietrich Bonhoeffer

acknowledges that God plays a very necessary part in that. Interestingly, it's a faith that also acknowledges the righteousness of God.

- There is *bicycle* faith. Bicycle? Remember when you first learned to ride a bike? You were sure that it would tip over – but you found that when the wheels were turning, it stayed up. After a while, you came to depend on that fact and gave it no more thought. God becomes a spiritual bicycle: I don't know how it works, but it does. So I pray every day, wondering what will happen next.
- There is *inside straight* faith. Inside straight? Any poker player will tell you: never bet on an inside straight. This is the faith that says if God tells you to bet an inside straight, bet it and draw three. It's the faith of one who knows that God will provide, trusts in that fact – and is constantly delighted with how God provided this time.

Our centurion had inside straight faith. He didn't know how, but he knew that God would provide – all he wanted was for God to say the word.

On Doubt - Luke 7:11-35

It is a curious, little noted fact: many of the prominent men of faith described in the Bible have their moments when that faith was clouded by doubt. There were times that these great men showed that doubt afflicts them too. Gideon needed two passes with the fleece; Elijah fled from Jezebel after Mount Carmel; Peter denied his Lord three times. Here Jesus deals with the doubt of John the Baptist. But first we must set the stage.

Raising the Dead

Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep." And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak. And *Jesus* gave him back to his mother. Fear gripped them all, and they *began* glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!"
(Luk 7:11-16 NASB)

I suppose it is of interest to know where Nain was; it was just a long walk away from Nazareth, as seen on the map:

Map courtesy of the International Standard Version, via E-Sword

The Compassion of Christ

In this time it would be hard to find a more tragic scene than this. We must remember that the widow is the symbol of poverty in this time. She would be dependent upon her son for her food; so his

death not only deprived her of her only son, but also her daily bread. Her circumstances are indeed grave.

- Note how Christ handles this: *before* he performs this miracle, he comforts the widow. This is not the action of a man going through the steps of the job; it is the act of a compassionate Son of Man. It is a simple point, but worthy of repetition: Christ cares, deeply, for you. Before she knows what He will do, the widow is comforted.

The phrasing here is instructive: Christ gives her back her son. Children are a gift from God, who gives every good and perfect gift. It is his good pleasure to be generous with us.

The authority of Christ

It is a characteristic of Christ: he does not ask permission to do the socially unacceptable; he simply does it. He halts the funeral procession. This is highly unusual; the Jews would be very desirous of finishing the funeral that day, because of the ceremonial uncleanness of touching a dead body. Even in our day we can hardly imagine someone who would stop a funeral midway.

The word used for coffin here does not mean what it does in our language. It was usually a simple stretcher of boards on which the body, wrapped in linen, would be placed. If this were a little child, you might see a box like an open coffin – but in any event the body would be plainly visible to all.

Note, then, that the raising of the dead is therefore a highly public and undeniable event. The crowd with Jesus, the funeral procession both would see this. And please note that Jesus goes through no Pentecostal mumbo-jumbo; he simply gives the command. As he stilled the waves, he orders the dead to rise – and they obey. His authority is indeed great, and now complete; the question is not his authority but our obedience.

Fear grips the people

We shall have to have a new acronym: FABS. It stands for "Finding A Bomb Syndrome." It's the shock you get when you discover that your war souvenir, so long thought a blank, is actually loaded with explosive. The crowd had it. See the symptoms:

- First, they had to have an explanation – the man is a prophet, that's why we didn't know the gun was loaded. Who would have thought that the dead would be raised?
- They also recognize that the power had to come from somewhere else – and they rightly state that God has visited his people.

Dealing With Doubt

This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district. The disciples of John reported to him about all these things. Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?" When the men came to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?'" At that very time He cured many *people* of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many *who were* blind. And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: *the* BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed, and *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised up, *the* POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

(Luk 7:17-23 NASB)

Why does John doubt?

It is a fascinating question. This is the man who proclaimed, "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." How, then, can he be unsure?

- Some hold that he is not. He is simply sending his disciples to Jesus. John is in prison, and he's passing his disciples to the Christ. This seems contrary to the sense of the Scripture here.
- We should note that John's not the only one. As mentioned, Elijah, Gideon and Peter all had the same problem. They are not alone; there are many others. So we should suspect that John's doubt comes from natural causes.

Indeed, his doubt does. He is locked in a prison cell with no hope of release. Herod intends to hang on to him, first to keep him quiet over the matter of Herod taking his brother's wife and second because he is fascinated with the man. What John has learned as a prophet he also remembers – but he remembers as a man, a man in prison. He's heard it in private, proclaimed it in public – but now in the small hours of the night, he wonders. And so he sends two trusted followers to find out.

How Jesus deals with it

First, note what Christ does not do: He does not flatly state that he is "the one." He is dealing with doubt, and doubt does not vanish with mere assurance. Indeed, if he were to have replied that way, John might have doubted more – it is, after all, only the man's word for it. To avoid controversy about testifying about himself (and thus provoking even more doubt in John's mind), Jesus lets the facts speak for themselves.

And which facts does Christ choose to send back with these two?

- First, they are things which are prophesied about the coming Messiah in the Old Testament. John now can reason that the prophets of old – who died long before this – saw this coming; this must indeed be the one to come. Christ does not weave a complicated theological reply; he gives him the facts.
- He also mentions that the poor are the recipients of this good news. Not only is this prophesied, but it also tells John that Jesus is no fraud. Perhaps John's days in the desert made him feel that the Messiah must be ascetic as well. Jesus parties with the people; can this be real? Jesus banishes that fear; a fraud would preach to the rich in the hopes of gaining their money. Christ preaches to the poor because God loves them.
- Finally, Christ admonishes John (and indirectly us) that we should never be embarrassed to name the name of Christ. He scorned the humiliation of the Cross for us; we should therefore bear his name without shame.

Jesus, on John

When the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are *found* in royal palaces! "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. "This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' "I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

(Luk 7:24-28 NASB)

The crowd may have a misapprehension at this point. Sending people to inquire of Jesus may seem like being a man who just can't make up his mind. Jesus points out that those who went to hear John didn't go out there to hear a hesitant, indecisive message. That is definitely not John's style. This is not a man who wavers; this is a man who is decisive. So Jesus assures them that their time spent with John was not wasted.

Indeed, he says, John's lifestyle was his witness. You want a preacher in the three piece silk suit? You won't find him out in the wilderness! But God breeds his prophets there. Indeed, John is the greatest of the prophets.

Christ then tells us that the least in the kingdom of God is greater. We can only understand that as a reference to the righteousness of Christ, given at the Cross, which we put on when we come to faith.

Wisdom's Children

When all the people and the tax collectors heard *this,* they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John. "To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like? "They are like children who sit in the market place and call to one another, and they say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.' "For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon!' "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' "Yet wisdom is vindicated by all her children."
(Luk 7:29-35 NASB)

John the Ascetic

Christ now makes a very interesting point. First, consider John: he was an ascetic. He denied himself luxury by living in the wilderness. Like the Old Testament prophets before him, this was a credential of his being an authentic prophet of God. Nowadays, we might picture him as a fire and brimstone Southern Baptist preacher, thumping on the Bible, thumping on the pulpit.

And what is the world's reaction to this? See if you've heard:

- "The man obviously is some sort of nut case."
- "No fire and brimstone for me, I believe in the God of love."
- "Real preachers have real churches – you know, buildings with steeples."

So the world now would reject John just as the world did then. What is God to do about such people?

Christ, the winebibber and friend of sinners

Ah, but Christ does not come like that. His closeness to God the Father is intrinsic; it goes with him. His credentials are not so much fire and brimstone but the credentials of one who would claim the title Son of Man. His intent is to show us that he is perfectly man – as we will discover his divinity quite soon enough. And what would such a man meet today?

- "Real men of God would never drink, never party and certainly wouldn't go around with people like that!"
- "Aren't you supposed to be all fire and brimstone?"
- "Real preachers have real churches – and stay inside them."

So the world now has a reason to reject Christ too. And what does he say about that?

Wisdom's deeds

Christ is the wisdom and power of God.[55] The reaction of the world does not depend upon what God does but what kind of people we are – or want to be.

- There are those who are carnal, for whom the things of this world are absolutely desirable above all else.
- There are those who are spiritual, for whom the things of God are desirable above all else.

Telling them apart is easy, When they meet the Living God, the spiritual ones are glad and praise the result. The carnal ones criticize God's technique. What's your mouth been saying lately?

[55] 1 Corinthians 1:24

The Other Woman - Luke 7:36-50

We must begin with a brief explanation. For many years this woman has been identified with Mary Magdalene or occasionally Mary of Bethany (sister of Lazarus). A careful examination will show that, while the incidents are similar, the locations are not. This woman's name is unknown to us, but her example still shines.

Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined *at the table.* And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining *at the table* in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind *Him* at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner." And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." Those who were reclining *at the table* with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this *man* who even forgives sins?" And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."
(Luk 7:36-50 NASB)

Let us begin by examining what we might reasonably presume about the woman in question. From other documents of the time, it is clear that the woman is a prostitute. It is fashionable in our time to decry the prosecution of prostitution on the grounds that it is a "victimless crime." To this I make the following reply:

- Certainly the prostitute herself is a victim. In our own time such women are likely to be drug users utterly controlled by a pimp – who makes his money off her addiction. Her customers treat her roughly, and her sexual experiences make her much less likely to have a stable marriage later on.
- But it's not just her. The existence and use of prostitutes has broken up many marriages. In this instance the adultery is not misguided passion but lust renting a partner. The effect on the wife is devastating.
- Not just the wife; the children. There is no quicker way for a father to tell his children that he has neither love nor respect for his wife than to hire a prostitute. His actions curse his own children with a warped picture of marriage.

  Note that none of this covers sexually transmitted diseases. It is fashionable in our time to refer to prostitutes as "sex workers," a misunderstood and wrongfully shamed group of women. You might as well call a stick of dynamite a drain cleaner. It will definitely clear the drain.

- *And yet* – it is very likely that this woman had made a hard choice when she became a prostitute. If she were a young widow, especially with children, she would be faced with the bitter choice of living

in grinding poverty occasionally relieved by spasms of charity, or the life of a social outcast – but a rich social outcast. Sinners often plead their circumstances; perhaps she had hers to plead. It is no matter; it is still sin. But I suspect that most of our female readers would admit that they have never had to make that hard choice.

If she had, the shame of her choice, stuffed in behind her pride, would have increased her guilt all the more. By the time she gets to Jesus, her mind would be in the gutter and her heart down below that.

The Woman

There are three simple threads I would have you pick up in this woman's story.

Her gift

This gift tells us much. We know from the history of the time about the alabaster vial of perfume. It is expensive – perhaps a years wages for a day laborer, which would be something like $12,000 today, at minimum wage. Its chief characteristic is in the way you open it. You break the neck of the jar.

- The woman gave much, but not partially. She gave it all to Christ.
- To give, she had to break it. Symbolically, this is the acceptable sacrifice of the sinner – a broken and contrite heart.

This is an act of devotion – it may look extravagant to the world, it is costly to the giver, but it is greatly praised by God.

Her heart

We must understand that this was first an act of courage on the woman's part. It is courage, because she had to face the righteous who knew what she did. It is courage, because she is going to humble herself in front of them. We can well imagine how she treated Simon should she have met him in the market place – with a sassy air defying his righteousness. No doubt she had publicly sparred with the righteous – but did so knowing that her customers came by night, for the shame of it.

The woman does understand righteousness. When she sees it in the man Jesus, her reaction is instant: here is one who can forgive. The righteousness of God is not without the mercy of God. So she goes to do the one thing which is the highest form of worship she can muster: she anoints him. She is so humbled that she dare not anoint his head, only his feet. It is her sign that she knows this man to be very much a prophet of God.

Her tears

Her humbling is completed in this: she lets down her hair (a thing no respectable woman would do in public) and weeps over his feet. Her contrition, her humiliation are complete in those tears. This is all the more impressive in that she has spent her life in prostitution – a life which requires a brassy attitude.

This sense is always with the servant of God. There is the nagging feeling that, somehow, the angels of heaven must have made a mistake – picked up the wrong name on the list. The service of the

Lord is accompanied by the feeling that you are just not worthy to do it. This is one reason our Lord commends obedience.

Tears – a form of salt water – symbolize the washing away of sins. We don't know the woman's name but her tears will always be remembered.

Christ and Simon

I cannot do better to explain this than to quote from a communion meditation written a few years ago:

Dan Sickles was, in the 1850s, an up and coming politician, a Congressman from New York. He was a member of one of the most prominent of political organizations (and the most corrupt): Tammany Hall. He had his sights set upon becoming president of the United States. He might have made it -- had he not shot and killed Philip Barton Key. Key was the son of Francis Scott Key, the man who wrote "The Star Spangled Banner," our national anthem. He was a good friend of Sickles. He was also Sickles' lawyer, and Sickles appears to have used his influence to have Key appointed as United States attorney. He also was Mrs. Sickles' lover.

One day, on the street across from the White House, Sickles met Key. He pulled out his revolver and shot him dead on the spot. That accomplished, he walked down the street to surrender the revolver (and himself) to the Attorney General.

The trial was a public circus. People debated whether or not Sickles was a man who had defended the sanctity of marriage or a common murderer. Remember, this was in a time when almost everyone in America believed that divorce was morally wrong. Adultery was not "an affair," but one of the worst sins anyone could commit. Meanwhile, his defense team (including Edwin Stanton, later the Secretary of War for Abraham Lincoln) came up with a new defense. For the first time in American justice, they raised the defense of "temporary insanity." They argued that the shock of finding out that his wife was untrue to him, and with his best friend, was so great as to render him insane. The court acquitted him.

He returned to Congress to find himself an absolute pariah. When he entered the hall, other members refused even to sit near him. He was totally ostracized -- but not for murder. You see, he had done something so utterly scandalous as to make the shooting seem trivial by comparison. He forgave his wife, and took her back.

There is a sense of shame and resentment when forgiveness is granted.

Simon

We must first note that Simon is, as Jesus points out, a man with little which needs be forgiven. Jesus does not condemn him as a hypocrite; it is likely enough that he is an ordinary, righteous man. Jesus' lesson goes beyond righteousness to mercy. Simon could point to his wealth and say that this is the blessing of God, and likely enough it was so. But he is one who knows his social circles well, and this woman has no place in them – at least, not in daylight.

Indeed, Simon is a man of propriety. That's why he's disturbed when the woman comes to Jesus; she's out of her place. Simon assumes that if Jesus were as he claimed to be, he'd know that, and would not tolerate her presence.

There is a great clue to the success (or lack of it) in the church today. Ask yourself this: why is it that the righteousness of Jesus, which is impeccable, attracts the sinner – and the lesser righteousness of Simon the Respectable does not? If you seek the answer, remember the older brother.

Christ

One of the great attractions of Christ was his complete indifference to social structure. As an older translation put it, he was "no respecter of persons." The reason for this is simple: what honor, what power, what status could possibly exceed that of the King of Kings? He is not so much indifferent to social structure as above it.

This attitude – that from the throne of heaven the difference in social position of the prostitute and the Pharisee is trivial – seems hard, some times. But remember the mission of Christ: to seek and save the lost. If you are in the business of rescuing drowning men, head for the ocean, not the desert. In a very real sense she did not so much choose Christ as the grace of God chose her.

Christ tells her that her faith has saved her. This seems to deny grace, but it is not so. The Scripture tells us[56] that Abraham believed God – and God counted this as righteousness. The principle has not changed in four thousand years.

Go in peace

(I am indebted to the sermons of C. H. Spurgeon for this section).

Often neglected is Christ's benediction to the woman. "Go in peace," he said, and we leave it at that. But the point is worthy of some elaboration.

Why not just "go?"

Consider that this woman's reaction must be like many of those whom Christ healed: their first thought is to stay with their new-found Lord. Like Mary in the garden on Easter, she would want to hold on to him.

So why did Jesus tell her to leave?

- First, there was bound to be some debate which Luke does not record. She would have been obliged to defend herself – which would be very hard to do.
- Despite her repentance, the situation was an awkward one for Jewish society. As a matter of manners, she's in the wrong place (it's a male only banquet). The lesson Jesus gives will be stronger for her absence.

Despite this, or because of it, Jesus tells her to go – but go in peace. It lightens the departure.

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[56] Genesis 15:6

Go from…

We can see that she would want to leave the self-righteous; she would have no desire for publicity (public repentance is hard enough). But do you not see that Christ is telling her to go from a peak spiritual experience back into everyday life? If she was indeed a widow, her livelihood was gone. She must go back to holy poverty. To soften this, Jesus tells her to go, but go in peace.

We may feel the same way at times. We want to stay in our mountain top experience of the Lord, but he sends us back to the valley all the same. But he sends us back with the peace of God; what a difference that makes!

Go in peace

Work through this with me, please. This woman has family – who undoubtedly do not approve of her, and they would make this very clear to her. It is a natural temptation in this to bring up the woman's past rejection of the sound advice given – and bring it up over and over again. Christ grants her peace; these quibbles no longer matter. The peace of God surpasses all understanding – and all criticism.

Indeed, this peace insulates her from her own memory of sin. Satan will throw her past life in her face as often as possible. But the peace of God is sufficient as a defense. She need but say to him, "You're perfectly right. I was a horrible sinner – but now I am forgiven, and walk in God's peace." The memory of her sin loses its sting in the peace of God.

Mirror Images - Luke 8:1-18

Once during his stay in England, Mark Twain received a letter: “I have had the privilege of seeing you in the street and I was stunned by the amazing likeness between the two of us. To corroborate this I’m sending you my photograph.” The name and address of the sender being on the envelope, Mark Twain expedited a reply. “You are right,” he wrote, “you look more like me than I do, thank you ever so much. I’ve put your photograph on my bedside table and use it as a mirror each time I shave my face…”

This lesson will present four us four images in the mirror. Look at the pictures, and see which one most closely resembles you.

Soon afterwards, He *began* going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, and *also* some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means. When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable: "The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up. "Other *seed* fell on rocky *soil,* and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. "Other *seed* fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. "Other *seed* fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." His disciples *began* questioning Him as to what this parable meant. And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is* in parables, so that SEEING THEY MAY NOT SEE, AND HEARING THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND. "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. "Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. "Those on the rocky *soil are* those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no *firm* root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. "The *seed* which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to maturity. "But the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance. "Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. "For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor *anything* secret that will not be known and come to light. "So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him *more* shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him."
(Luk 8:1-18 NASB)

Though this might be familiar ground (pun intended) for most, we must look at the point Christ is making here. It is convenient to divide things into the four types of soil described – but important to take each type and divide it into things internal and things external.

The Soils

The seed on the path

What does this person look like on the outside? It’s rather simple; there is no response to the Gospel. What surprises us sometimes is that the very memory of the word of God does not stay with

them. Satan, of course, does his best to remove such memory, but the main thing we see from the outside is this: the word is "trodden underfoot." You can't walk on something without being in a position to look down on it; that's the attitude you get. It is a hard, cynical attitude; like the bumper sticker that said, "Close your Bible and open your mind." The word is something that is trash under their feet.

The inside is not hard to guess: the hard hearted, looking out for number one type – though if their pride is appealed to, they're certainly willing to give their fair share. For these people I have a simple warning: God is no fool. He knows you. If I might extend Christ's parable just a bit, if God wants one of these, he knows he must plow the ground first. God will plow up some like this so that they will receive the word. The plowing is painful, often tragic – but for some it takes something like this before they will listen.

The seed in the rocks

We now come to one who may indeed appear to be a Christian. They grow and blossom; the church around them begins to see some results. It appears that all is going well. Indeed, it appears that they are on fire for Christ. But wait; it is all temporary. You find them afterwards and they'll tell you that "they did the church thing once." It's just a phase.

The inside of such is rather simple: no roots. With no roots, no moisture – the Living Water does not really reach them. (Think of cut flowers; beautiful for a few days, but doomed). What happens? Temptation. Something else comes along; they must decide between it and Christ – and the new always seems more interesting. Most today would not even use the word temptation; it's the "next thing." Sometimes the temptation comes through suffering; more often it comes through advertising, in one way or another. These are the ones who go from Zen to EST to exercise. They arrived quickly; they faded quickly.

The seed in the thorns

It is a sad fact, but the bulk of American Christianity fits into this category. Notice that the thorns "grew up with" the word. The thorns are competing with the word for space in their lives. The weeds are winning:

- There are the worries. Despite Christ's command to the contrary, everything must receive its share of worries. Now, if you are worrying constantly, you obviously are not trusting Christ. Here's a test for you: what do you say when your Christian friends quote "take no thought for the morrow?" If your reaction is, "They just don't understand," then you don't understand. The worries have you. Give them up to God; he's going to be up all night anyway.
- There are the riches. Riches are a good servant – but a poor master. They need constant attention. If your life is devoted to them, the word gradually falls away – from disuse. Two masters? Not going to happen.
- Strangely, the last weed, pleasures, is often ignored. But how often have you heard someone say that the reason they haven't been in church for a month is that last week they were camping at the river, the week before that they were on vacation in Hawaii, and so on? None of these are, in themselves, sinful. When they come first, Christ leaves.

The Good Soil

This is relatively straight forward. You can see these Christians from the outside from two simple characteristics:

- They are the ones producing. Their impact on other lives – whether teacher, preacher or not – consistently is there. Christ prunes the fruit of such Christians, but they just keep on producing it. Note one thing: this is not "super Christian." It takes no superhuman effort; it takes only the Holy Spirit within. God uses them; they are his body on earth.
- They produce their fruit with perseverance. They are not temporary Christians but lifelong learners and doers. Even if their work must be left to the next generation, they persevere.

The inside of such Christians is simple too:

- They have an honest heart. What you see is what they are. There is no thought of keeping up appearances; they would agree with Popeye the Sailor: "I am what I am."
- They have a good heart. Take it how you like, these are people who rejoice when righteousness triumphs, when mercy is shown, when charity blooms.
- They "hold fast." Having grasped the one important thing in life, they do not let go. The kingdom of heaven is like a pearl of great price; the main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing. If I may mix my metaphors.

God's Method

You might wonder why we include those last four verses. It's simple. We've talked about inside and outside the Christian. What you need to know is that the inside is going to be made plain and apparent. The laundry will be aired eventually, dirty or not. God will make it plain, if only on the day of judgment (and usually a lot sooner than that.)

So it is that Christ warns us to take care how we listen. Listen? One more time through the soils:

- On the path? Not listening.
- In the rocks? Listening – but not too long and not too well.
- In the weeds? Listening – but worry, riches and pleasure are listened to even more.
- In the good soil? Listening to Christ, and Him alone.

The inside determines the outside. So I ask you these questions:

- What does your outside look like? No growth" Flash in the soil? Somewhere in the weeds?
- Who is your inside listening to?

The answers to these will be clear some day. But then it will be too late to change your answer.

Where Is Your Faith? - Luke 8:19-39

One of the great frustrations of the Christian life is this: your friends and family know quite well that you are a Christian; they see Christ in your life – and they just don't care. They regard you as being reasonable on all subjects but that one. Just so you'll know, Jesus had precisely the same problem:

And His mother and brothers came to Him, and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd. And it was reported to Him, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You." But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it."
(Luk 8:19-21 NASB)

Mark's Gospel tells us plainly that they thought he'd gone off his rocker. They stand outside – waiting for him to come to them. The attitude is that Jesus is being completely unreasonable, but his family is here to straighten him out and take him home – for a nice cup of tea, dear. Heard this reaction before?

We know from later history that eventually they accepted him for who he is. But may I point out something you might have missed? Even being the mother of the Christ, the "theotokos," the mother of God in the Catholic and Orthodox churches, is not sufficient honor to enter the kingdom of God. His own mother cannot remain in the kingdom of God – unless she "hears and does" the word of God. What, then, of the twice a month churchgoer? [57]

Christ, and not for the last time, proclaims the great divide. Those who are against him are condemned; those with him are his family.

- May I give you an illustration? The night before I wrote this, my family and I watched the movie *Lilo and Stitch.* Stitch is a monster – literally – who finds on this strange planet a family to love him. It's a fun movie – the kids enjoy the space ships, villains and comic relief. But at the center of the message is the Hawaiian word *ohana*. It means family; according to Lilo it means "no one gets forgotten, no one is left behind." At the start of the movie Stitch is really a monster, but the longing to belong to family changes him. God intends the same for us. He wants all of us in his family. As we shall see, this carries with it some enormous implications.

The way to stay in that family, however, is clear and simple: hear and do the word of God. You must be instructed to know what to do; you must then have the will to do it.

Where is your faith?

Christ, having said that, now shows the nature both of faith and of the object of that faith:

Now on one of *those* days Jesus and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they launched out. But as they were sailing along He fell

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[57] Somehow I seriously doubt that Mary had this problem for long. The point is not one of intrinsic merit; none of us are righteous enough – but if you are a child of God, just what should you be doing? Resting on your laurels – or worse yet, resting on the laurels of Christ?

asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they *began* to be swamped and to be in danger. They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm. And He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?"
(Luk 8:22-25 NASB)

The doctrine

Let us be perfectly clear of the doctrine we are teaching here:

- First, Jesus of Nazareth, is God in the flesh – 100%. He is also 100% man.
- Second, this same Jesus is the one who created all things that exist in this universe; he is also the one who sustains this universe by his will. Gravity works today like yesterday – because he wills it so.
- To command the universe is his by right – and by power.
- This power, in the form of his providence, is open to all believers who will come to him in prayer.
- He answers those prayers within his will – his providence for his purposes; sustaining those who "hear and do."

Christ's purpose

It is obvious that Christ allowed this to happen; evidently for the purpose of instructing his disciples. Let us see what matters are being taught:

- First, he is teaching them that they are not to be dismayed by difficulties. As a good teacher should, he first got their attention – by having the storm come up and threaten to sink the boat. This causes them to admit that they are having a bit of difficulty making the crossing.
- By pushing them to arouse him, he makes them confess that they are in difficulties too great for them to handle. How often Christ does this with us!
- And – after handling this difficulty – he teaches them again. "Where is your faith?" It is a necessity of the Christian life.

Let's look at that last again. Do you see what he is saying? He expects you to expect him to provide all you will need – tangible goods, circumstances, "coincidences," changes of heart, even a miracle if need be – to do his word.

Indeed, this is so obvious to him that he also gives the disciples another example: modesty when being honored. These men are awestruck to the point of terror. But Christ does not accept their praise; he considers the matter a small one.

One more little thing: see the Teacher at work. Mark tells us that there are several other boats hauling people across the lake that night. They see the storm being calmed – but do not hear the rebuke. Christ teaches us to rebuke our brothers in private.

Demons

All of this may not seem to have anything to do with this next section – but it does. The matter is relatively simple. Christ has called to the world, proclaiming the great divide. He has shown us that he has power over all things physical; now he will demonstrate his power over all things spiritual.

Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when He came out onto the land, He was met by a man from the city who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs. Seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me." For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard, and *yet* he would break his bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert. And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss. Now there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; and *the demons* implored Him to permit them to enter the swine. And He gave them permission. And the demons came out of the man and entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and *out* in the country. *The people* went out to see what had happened; and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened. Those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well. And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to leave them, for they were gripped with great fear; and He got into a boat and returned. But the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that he might accompany Him; but He sent him away, saying, "Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.
(Luk 8:26-39 NASB)

Demons – then and now

This is one of those things that has changed with our modern world. In those days, demon possession was a commonplace thing. The demons themselves were thought of as gods, outside Jewish society. Demons had two purposes in those days:

- To mislead all they could. Satan is their prince; the father of lies, the father of liars.
- To dominate those they can – and frighten those they can't.

In our day, demons are not a commonplace – except where they are. In third world countries, especially those with animist beliefs, missionaries will tell you tales of the power they have encountered. Demons now have two purposes:

- To mislead all they can. Satan is still their prince.
- To dominate those they can – and frighten those they can't.

The difference today is simply in the misleading – in our civilization the thrust is that they don't really exist (and hence the Bible is false).

What can we learn from this incident?

First – and obviously – demons fear Christ. It is the awe due to Almighty God. Even a liar can be frightened into the truth.

Interestingly, the demons seek to go into the pigs. Evidently they need a body if they are to exercise power in the physical world. This idea is the source of the myth that demons are nothing more than disembodied spirits of the dead. Ancestor worship revolves around this. In the time of Christ,

"magicians" (i.e., those in league with the demonic) would actually sacrifice a small child deliberately – so that its soul would become a familiar spirit for the magician.

Magic and science

To understand this correctly, you must see the intense evil in having that familiar spirit – a demon who grants you favors in return for your worship. It is a betrayal of the human race, for Satan is our accuser. But the purpose of the magician is not to betray; he thinks he is doing precisely what the scientist thinks he's doing.

How so? Both magic and science are based upon the paradigm of "if…then." If you mix these ingredients at this temperature, you get that alloy. Both are trying to manipulate the universe – physically at least, and spiritually if possible. Science manipulating the spiritual is usually called psychology. Science depends upon the fact of Christ's sustaining the universe – whether the scientist recognizes this or not. Science depends upon the laws of the universe being the same everywhere and always. Thus, if motivation works here, it should work there. If the familiar spirit obtains results today, he will always obtain results.

Note that neither of these two will tell you anything about what you ought to do – only what you ought to do to achieve certain results. But if there is no "I ought" there remains the "I want." Hence Faust tells us that a sound magician is a mighty god. The purpose of magic and the purpose of science are now the same; to get what I want.

It little profits a man to gain the whole world if he lose his soul.

Summary

I leave you with three thoughts:

- Who are those in God's family? Those who hear and do the word.
- There is no limit on what God will do in the physical universe for those whom he loves.
- There is no force in the spiritual world which can deflect him in the slightest.

Choose well whom you will serve.

Healing On The Way - Luke 8:40-56

It is rather rare that the authors of the Gospels mingle two stories together. We must presume that this is meant for our instruction.

And as Jesus returned, the people welcomed Him, for they had all been waiting for Him. And there came a man named Jairus, and he was an official of the synagogue; and he fell at Jesus' feet, and *began* to implore Him to come to his house; for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying. But as He went, the crowds were pressing against Him. And a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. And Jesus said, "Who is the one who touched Me?" And while they were all denying it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing in on You." But Jesus said, "Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me." When the woman saw that she had not escaped notice, she came trembling and fell down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed. And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." While He was still speaking, someone *came from *the house of* the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore." But when Jesus heard *this,* He answered him, "Do not be afraid *any longer;* only believe, and she will be made well." When He came to the house, He did not allow anyone to enter with Him, except Peter and John and James, and the girl's father and mother. Now they were all weeping and lamenting for her; but He said, "Stop weeping, for she has not died, but is asleep." And they *began* laughing at Him, knowing that she had died. He, however, took her by the hand and called, saying, "Child, arise!" And her spirit returned, and she got up immediately; and He gave orders for *something* to be given her to eat. Her parents were amazed; but He instructed them to tell no one what had happened.
(Luk 8:40-56 NASB)

The Approach

We must begin with a presumption: Jairus is, as he appears, a man of ordinary righteousness. He's doing the best he can as an elder of the synagogue. But there are certain dangers for those who live such a life:

- There is the danger that "to know" will substitute for "to do" – if you know a lot, anyway.
- It's easy to feel that you "have it made." After all, God listens to me; people respect me.
- Sometimes, it's easy to feel superior to others. Especially if things are going well, it's easy to see yourself as deserving God's blessing where others do not. You feel superior – in a loving way, of course.

God takes such a man and, for reasons known only to God, humbles him. He finds that his righteous conduct does not immunize him from trouble and tragedy. His knowledge of the Law may be superior – but your kids are your kids.

That's often the way God teaches his teachers. When he does, the first question you have is, "Why me?" God is not inclined to gratify your curiosity, nor justify his actions to you. He is Lord God Almighty, and it is well to remember that.

Indeed, the true servant of God must know how to deal with this situation.

- He must accept, indeed embrace, God's humbling. It is most certainly a sign that God loves you, and that you are indeed his child.
- He must then seek God's face. It is almost unavoidable to ask "why me?", but there are other questions as well.
- He must then ask and expect an answer. God will not leave us rudderless and adrift

The Example

It is clear, I think, that the timing of this woman's healing, and her testimony of that healing, were done to increase the faith of Jairus. It is remarkable how we think faith to be something you either have or you don't – when God tells us that if we lack faith, we should ask. When the Apostles cried, "Lord, increase our faith," Jesus replied with the parable of the mustard seed.

The situation of this woman must be understood if we are to see what an example she would be. According to the Law, this woman would be unclean – she and everything she touched – constantly. Since the flow of blood did not end, neither did her uncleanness. Mark tells us that she has gone from one doctor to the next, using up her money. So she's an outcast, she's broke – and she's heard about this teacher. All she has to go on is a name and a reputation. Her approach, therefore, is something like magic. She imagines to herself that all she has to do is touch his cloak – then she will be healed.

Note, please, that her theology is a little out of whack. Christ's cloak is not a magic talisman. But under the theology is that which God rewards: faith. Our theology should be as correct as we can make it – but remember that God seeks those who have faith, and rewards them. That she has; that she uses.

Christ's response

Who touched me? As the disciples point out, from the world's point of view, how could you tell? Look at this crowd! But Jesus knows the power has gone out from him for healing. That power rides the cables of faith.

Why did Jesus ask this question? Most likely the answer is this: he wanted those around (especially Jairus) to hear her testimony. It's a small town; everybody knew her (and knew to stay away).

- Her testimony is given in fear. She is unclean (and therefore not supposed to touch *anyone*, let alone a distinguished visiting rabbi) and she is unauthorized – for Christ did not give his permission or his command. But testify she does; she is the witness of her own blessing. We would do well to follow the example; we are the world's most expert witnesses for what Christ has done for us.

Christ replies, and we can see three things from his reply:

- "Daughter." The very word would be music to a woman who is unclean. A member of the family once again! Back with her own family, back with the family of God. It is the word of welcome.
- "Your faith has made you well." See the humility of Christ! See also the encouragement Christ gives to the faithful; this is grand news for those who wait in faith. Jesus honors faith in God.
- "Go in peace." It is not sufficient simply to heal; he assures her that the days ahead will not be loaded with terror, but with the peace of God.

The personal touch

May we pause here for some obvious points of instruction for Christians today?

- Above all else, we must touch the person of Jesus – or as we might say it today, we must have a personal relationship with Christ.
- If we do, we shall be blessed. Not on the whim of God, but based upon his eternal, unchanging character.
- When we are blessed, not only does Christ know it – others should know it too. We should be the witnesses to our blessings for our Lord.

The Miracle

The world has a way with bad news. Are these folks just a little anxious to get the word to the man? The kid's dead, stop bothering the teacher.

Teacher – the word is seldom used for one of power. But it is something Christ did continually. Here has taught Jairus:

- He taught him that the power of God is within Jesus – it is his, by right. It is not something applied externally by God; it is internal to God.
- He sees that this power is connected with faith.
- He sees that this Jesus is one who knows things others could never find out.

Jesus has three messages for Jairus:

- "Don't be afraid" – fear hinders faith. Fear looks to the future with dread; faith looks to the future with hope.
- "Only believe" – nothing else is required to touch the heart of God.
- "She will be made well" – a promise. Can it be kept?

One note on the local culture: the mourners are paid professionals. Much like we hire a funeral home to handle matters, at this time people had paid mourners to express their grief. It seems strange to us, but it was not to them.

- These are the ones who laugh at Jesus. His reply is curious: "She has not died, but is asleep." These folks have participated in many funerals, so they laugh. But note please that Jesus describes this miracle as a *fact.* He is the great "I AM" – what to us is prophecy is to him simply fact.

The miracle itself seems simply done. It is by word and touch – just as you would comfort a human being. Christ takes no troubles to advertise this; the list of those who saw it is small – probably because it was a small room. The facts would soon be evident.

One last: notice the practical instructions – feed the kid. Our Lord does not dwell long on the miracle; he commands us to do what we can do in service to him.

Summary

May I send you away with three main points?

- God teaches his servants in their humility – for it is then they are most likely to learn.
- Faith is the core of the matter; and that faith is a personal one – believing in the person Jesus, the Christ.

- When God says it is so, even if it hasn't happened yet, it is so – no matter what "they" say.

Church Growth - Luke 9:1-27

Sometimes a string of incidents in the Gospel may appear to have no particular thread or theme. Sometimes the thread is a little below the surface. Today's thread is the growth of the church. We start with evangelism.

And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing. And He said to them, "Take nothing for *your* journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not *even* have two tunics apiece. "Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that city. "And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." Departing, they *began* going throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening; and he was greatly perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen again. Herod said, "I myself had John beheaded; but who is this man about whom I hear such things?" And he kept trying to see Him. When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. Taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida.
(Luk 9:1-10 NASB)

Sent with great power

One of the great themes of Christ is that his followers don't do things in the world's way. The world would set out in this by building a college, training people and preparing lots of literature. Seminars would be held; and always there would be the air of a new academic theory being tested. The hearer would clearly understand that this new belief system was appealing to them to be the judge of its fitness.

Christ does no such thing. He sends his disciples out with authority and power:

- They have authority over things spiritual; even the demons are subject to them. Doesn't sound like much for those who watch television demons; but remember that the demon is a fallen angel, a being of great spiritual power.
- They have authority over things temporal – he gives them the authority and power to heal diseases.

Interestingly, he sends them out on a mission which has two somewhat contradictory messages:

- One mission is to preach the kingdom of God. That implies a wandering style, no great buildings, just the voice from the wilderness.
- The other mission is to heal; that implies a permanence.

The church, from its very start, is what the modern theorists call "goal conflicted." One goal is evangelism; preach and move on. The other is the maturing of the saints, which implies a permanence of place and effort. Such an organization, by modern theory, cannot long exist. So much for modern theory.

Sent in poverty

They are sent in power, but also in poverty. Why?

- First, to avoid suspicion. The itinerant beggar clothed with the priesthood of some god was a familiar sight in ancient times. Christ's messengers are giving away eternal life; a gift so costly that it cannot be bought. Should they then be like Elijah's servant?
- Next, to avoid distraction. The things of this world should be of no great concern to them. They are not burdened with other duties.
- Finally, to show the world – and the disciples – their utter and complete dependence upon God. And to show that God does not fail them.

The reaction of the world

There seem to be three common reactions to the Gospel, the news of the kingdom:

- One, of course, is joyful acceptance.
- Another is rejection. If this happens, the disciple is to shake the dust off his feet. This comes from an ancient tradition. The Jew, knowing the land of Israel to be holy, would shake of the unholy dust of foreign lands upon entering into Israel. It is a way of saying that the kingdom is holy ground, not to be defiled with those who reject it.
- Ad then there is Herod's reaction – the official reaction. He knows that he is in charge of the area; this Jesus is subject to him. He also knows this man is not an ordinary subject. Do you crush him quickly? Do you co-opt him? Or just wait and see? Herod never saw him – until Good Friday.

Feeding the Five Thousand

It doesn't exactly sound like it has anything to do with church growth – but listen.

But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He *began* speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." But He said to them, "You give them *something* to eat!" And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down *to eat* in groups of about fifty each." They did so, and had them all sit down. Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke *them,* and kept giving *them* to the disciples to set before the people. And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets *full.*
(Luk 9:11-17 NASB)

This event is rather unusual. As you might imagine, events which appear in all four Gospels are considered very important. The Crucifixion, the Resurrection – these appear in all four. But (for example) the story of the birth of Jesus does not. This event is in all four Gospels; it therefore must be important. In fact, I submit that it is (among other things) an excellent picture of how the church is to grow. We shall look in on it.

The Disciples

One thing the disciples are sure of: they can't feed these people. They are also sure that it is SEP – Somebody Else's Problem. We can do nothing, so send these folks away to get something to eat.

- Do you not see that they are thinking in precisely the same fashion as the world? They are sure of the answer; they think they know what can and can't be done. But I submit the question to you:

just how good are you at predicting the future? Especially when you think it can't be done, you are very often wrong. You may be right about the fact that it *won't* be done, but it is foolish to neglect the Living God in your calculations.

- The real difficulty is this: the disciples do not believe that God *will* act. They assume he will do nothing. This prevents them from seeing the solution, or from trying it. The same is true today. We often make our plans without God, and then (as an afterthought) ask him to bless them. It just doesn't work that way. So how does it work?

Numbers big, groups small

Let's go back to "goal conflicted." God has a solution to this:

- In speaking to the world, the evangelist speaks to as many people as possible at one time. The Gospel is too precious to be kept silent.
- But in teaching the people how to live, the disciple is to work in a smaller group.

This keeps the evangelist humble, knowing that long term results must come from the hundreds of small group leaders. The small group leader, however, gets to hear a consistent and sound message. Of interest to many is this: the small group leader typically does not see a lot of growth in the kingdom. His group tends to stay about the same size; that's the size he can handle. It's just that God keeps forming new small groups.

Leftovers

In John's Gospel, he quotes Jesus as telling the disciples to gather the leftovers "so that nothing will be wasted." It is a sign that God wants no one forgotten, no one left behind. More to the point, the leftovers are now ready for the next meal.

How is this? Remember that God sends forth his word – and it does not "return unto him void." It accomplishes its purpose. The same can be seen in the food here – the fact that you have leftovers means that all have been fed. These leftovers are the sign of the completeness of God's word.

Who Do You Say I Am?

Is this about church growth? You bet.

And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, "Who do the people say that I am?" They answered and said, "John the Baptist, and others *say* Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again." And He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God." But He warned them and instructed *them* not to tell this to anyone, saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day."
(Luk 9:18-22 NASB)

The world's reaction to Jesus Christ comes in a variety of flavors. Two are given here; the first being that he's another preacher like John the Baptist – no miracles, but a great preacher. Others saw him in the miraculous, like the prophets of the Old Testament. That's the world's view – he's a great guy who can safely be ignored.

Lots of views, but only one truth. He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. Upon this fact the church is built.

Interestingly, Christ tells them to keep silent about it. The time is not yet ready; but soon there comes a time when his name will be proclaimed to all the world. Even as it is today.

The Paradox of Christian Living

Over and again in the New Testament we find the fundamental paradox of the Christian life: take up the Cross.

And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels. "But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."
(Luk 9:23-27 NASB)

Self-Denial

- Note the condition: if you want to *follow* him – not just admire him from a distance. What are you to do? Deny yourself. The word in the original means to "disown yourself." You are to give up all rights to yourself, handing them over to God. You will need to learn to say no to physical urges (hunger, sex), mental thoughts (he will tell you the truth), spiritual hunger (which he will fill) and emotional needs (which you will fill in others, and thus yourself).
- It sounds like such a negative life. It is not; for you not only deny yourself, you take up your cross. Note that he commands us to do this *daily*. It's not just a one time decision.
- You must *decide* each day to take up the cross. Yesterday's decision is gone; you must renew it today.
- You must *carry* it each day. You are not permitted to put it down for a week or so; it is your daily burden.
- You must *follow Him* each day. Take no thought for the morrow; you have enough things to do today.

Knowing what is profitable

The matter, in the end, is knowing what is truly profitable. The world is temporary; the kingdom eternal. You must choose one or the other as your objective – and stick with it.

The Day of Judgment is coming; when it arrives, your choices will be made plain for all to see. Sadly, few of this generation will be welcomed on that day. Hear what a saint from an older time says on this:

JESUS has always many who love His heavenly kingdom, but few who bear His cross. He has many who desire consolation, but few who care for trial. He finds many to share His table, but few to take part in His fasting. All desire to be happy with Him; few wish to suffer anything for Him. Many follow Him to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the chalice of His passion. Many revere His miracles; few approach the shame of the Cross. Many love Him as long as they encounter no hardship; many praise and

bless Him as long as they receive some comfort from Him. But if Jesus hides Himself and leaves them for a while, they fall either into complaints or into deep dejection. Those, on the contrary, who love Him for His own sake and not for any comfort of their own, bless Him in all trial and anguish of heart as well as in the bliss of consolation. Even if He should never give them consolation, yet they would continue to praise Him and wish always to give Him thanks. What power there is in pure love for Jesus -- love that is free from all self-interest and self-love!

Do not those who always seek consolation deserve to be called mercenaries? Do not those who always think of their own profit and gain prove that they love themselves rather than Christ? Where can a man be found who desires to serve God for nothing? Rarely indeed is a man so spiritual as to strip himself of all things. And who shall find a man so truly poor in spirit as to be free from every creature? His value is like that of things brought from the most distant lands.

If a man give all his wealth, it is nothing; if he do great penance, it is little; if he gain all knowledge, he is still far afield; if he have great virtue and much ardent devotion, he still lacks a great deal, and especially, the one thing that is most necessary to him. What is this one thing? That leaving all, he forsake himself, completely renounce himself, and give up all private affections. Then, when he has done all that he knows ought to be done, let him consider it as nothing, let him make little of what may be considered great; let him in all honesty call himself an unprofitable servant. For truth itself has said: "When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: 'we are unprofitable servants.'"

Then he will be truly poor and stripped in spirit, and with the prophet may say: "I am alone and poor." No one, however, is more wealthy than such a man; no one is more powerful, no one freer than he who knows how to leave all things and think of himself as the least of all.

(Thomas à Kempis)

The Transfiguration - Luke 9:28-36

This passage is at once one of the most clear and yet the most distant. It is clear because its symbolism and meaning have been easily interpreted from the beginning days of the church. Leo the Great, Chrysostom, Augustine, Aquinas, have all written on it; in our own times it was a favorite of C. H. Spurgeon. Yet today it is seldom mentioned from the pulpit. Perhaps we are so intent on things of the here and now that we cannot take the time for eternity.

Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing *became* white *and* gleaming. And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--not realizing what he was saying. While he was saying this, a cloud formed and *began* to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, *My* Chosen One; listen to Him!" And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.
(Luk 9:28-36 NASB)

Background

A very necessary background to this passage is found just slightly before this: Peter's confession of the Christ.

And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, "Who do the people say that I am?" They answered and said, "John the Baptist, and others *say* Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again." And He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God." But He warned them and instructed *them* not to tell this to anyone, saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day." And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels. "But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."
(Luk 9:18-27 NASB)

- It is first to be noted: God reveals himself only to the faithful. This is exceedingly inconvenient for the evangelist. It would be so wonderful if we could conjure up miracles on demand. But do you not see what that would mean? It would mean that we, the conjurors, had God *under our control.* Obviously, that's not going to happen. It is a contradiction; if we could control him, he would not be God. If we are to see God, it is on his terms, and his terms alone.

Christ tells the disciples that some of them will see the kingdom in power. A week later, three of them do. We might ask, why only three?

- First, under Jewish law, a thing was established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. So three would be the minimum for such a powerful display.
- But no more than three; this is so great a power that it must be kept secret until after the Crucifixion.

Why?

We might well ask, why did they see it at all? What was the use of this display of Christ's heavenly glory?

- First, Christ is about to go to a shameful, dishonorable death – crucified as if he were a criminal worthy of death. So that the disciples will not remain discouraged, he gives them a glimpse at his glory. They will know that he is indeed the Messiah; the rest can be set right at the Resurrection.
- Second, to give them the hope of the glory of the resurrection of the dead. It is told that we shall rise; little is known about what we will be like. But these disciples were given a glimpse.

The disciples were told not to speak of it – until after the Resurrection. One reason for this is to avoid jealousy among the disciples (remember, these folks argued over who would be the greatest.) They needed to see his glory before the Crucifixion – but the lessons learned would only be useful afterwards.

Moses and Elijah

OK, but why are Moses and Elijah there?

- First, Elijah is there at least for this: they now know for certain that Jesus is not the Elijah to come.
- More important, they are there to refute any idea that Jesus did not follow the Law of God. "Moses and Elijah" was often used as a way of saying, "The Law and the Prophets." If these two honor him, then there can be no such problem.
- This also shows his complete power and authority; power over the dead (Moses) and the living – Elijah, who never died. It also shows them the difference between the servants of God and their Lord.

These come to him and speak of his departure – the Crucifixion. Perhaps this is just assurance that all will happen as prophesied – and how they longed to see it.

"It is good for us to be here"

Here indeed is a mountain top experience, as we would put it. Yes, it is good for us to be here – scared out of our minds, in raw terror at the glory of God, knowing full well that no one looks upon God and lives. Yes it is; it is profitable to us in what we learned about Jesus of Nazareth – the fullness of his Deity. It is profitable for us in how we grew – just being close to the Living God.

But it is equally true that this experience must end. The mountain top is a glimpse of things to come, when our Lord returns. In the meanwhile, there is work to be done.

Three shelters

Your translation may have the word, "tabernacles." It means a booth, a shelter, a tent – a temporary housing framed in wood, covered with cloth. Each year, at the feast of the Tabernacles, the

devout Jew moved out of his house for seven days and lived in a tent. It was to remind him of how his ancestors wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Jews of this time would be quite familiar with this.

So Peter, his mouth opening before engaging his brain (which by now is out of commission), comes up with the only thing he can think of. It's good to be here; let's stay a while. We'll put up the tents and build the campfire for you.

It's not a bad idea. God does not rebuke Peter for this. But God has other plans. So he doesn't say anything to Peter. Has God ever done that with you? No response but his own plan? It's the same thing; it's not wrong to plan on God's behalf. It's just that sometimes he has something else in mind.

Peter's idea is "Old Testament." We'll put up tents here; blending the old and the new. God's idea is different: the new will complete and therefore replace the old. The Law and the Prophets give way to the reign of grace. The servants are not greater than the Master, nor even equal to him.

The cloud

The cloud would have been familiar to the Jews of the time – for they were very familiar with the story of the Exodus. Recall that the presence of God was indicated by the cloud in the day and the pillar of fire in the night. Only Moses went into that cloud to converse with God. Now that same cloud envelops them; can you imagine the feeling in their hearts?

But this cloud is even greater; the one for Moses was a thick darkness. This cloud is brilliant light. God is light, we are told. Here, it is literally so. In the days of Moses God threatened the people to keep them holy; hence the darkness of the cloud. Now the cloud is light; the reign of grace is about to begin.

The voice

The voice of God speaks; it is always good to listen to it.

- This is my son. If ever there was doubt as to who and what Jesus truly is, this eliminates it. God himself specifically tells us that this Jesus is his only son. He is not just another man; he is God in the flesh.
- He is the chosen one. To the Jew this could only mean one thing: this is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ.
- Hear him. If God has taken the trouble to prepare his way, to prophesy him for thousands of years, to prepare one people to receive him – then when he comes you had best listen to him.

It is a moment of awe. Matthew's account tells us that the disciples fell face down on the ground. God has removed any doubt. The reaction they gave is the right one; bow down and worship.

When He returns

All this may seem of "historical interest only." Our doctrine clearly teaches that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. But is there anything specific to this passage which applies to us today?

Indeed, there is. This transfiguration is a sample – of what we will be like when our Lord returns. It's just a sample, but it was as much as the disciples could handle. So it is written that no one

has seen just how we will be that day. We are told that the righteous will shine like the sun.[58] Perhaps we might take this more literally.

One thing is certain: we will be transformed at the resurrection of the dead. Somehow, by the word of Him who spoke and the worlds began, this earthly body of ours will be transformed. The church has always taught the resurrection of the body. We need to be ready for this.

What shall we do?

OK, just what should we be doing to prepare for this? Peter himself gives us an answer:

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things into which angels long to look. Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit,* fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
(1Pe 1:10-13 NASB)

Three things, then, we need to do:

- Prepare our minds for action. It is not sufficient that your faith be a warm feeling inside. You must know what you believe and why, ready to give the reason for your faith at any time.
- Be sober in spirit. Don't be one of those who go from spiritual high to low to high again; settle down and grow as a Christian should. Let the good ship grace ride on an even keel.
- Fix your hope completely on grace. Do not depend upon the works you have done for Christ, nor your position in the church, nor the words of any teacher – long only for the grace that Christ gives. Upon him, and upon him alone, rests our salvation.

[58] Matthew 13:43

Five Easy Pieces - Luke 9:37-62

(Note: there is no connection between the movie of that name and this lesson. I am told that the movie obtained its title from a book of beginning piano pieces which sound hard but are actually fairly easy. This lesson does somewhat the same thing; the five main points seem extremely difficult at time, but they are very much beginner's work.)

We present for your consideration five pieces. The theme of the concert is the kingdom of God. We shall examine five aspects of the kingdom:

- Its foundation
- Greatness in the kingdom
- Ins and outs
- Its purpose
- Its primacy

Foundation: Built upon the Rock

On the next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Him. And a man from the crowd shouted, saying, "Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only *boy,* and a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams, and it throws him into a convulsion with foaming *at the mouth;* and only with difficulty does it leave him, mauling him *as it leaves.* "I begged Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not." And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." While he was still approaching, the demon slammed him *to the ground* and threw him into a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they would not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement.
(Luk 9:37-45 NASB)

In the absence of Christ

- The key to understanding this passage is found in the fact that the disciples have been trying to cast out this demon *when Christ is not with them.* He and Peter, James and John have been on the mountain. In the valley below the other disciples have been working. We know from other accounts that the scribes were challenging them, and no doubt were enjoying the fact that these disciples seemed powerless.

So it is that when Christ returns to the scene the expectations of the crowd have been set – to failure. Christ turns the matter around quickly, hence they marvel at the greatness of God.

Unbelieving and perverted generation

It often seems that the availability of a miracle depends upon two factors:

- The strength of the one performing the miracle. The disciples cannot throw the demon out; Christ can.
- The strength of the faith of the bystanders. When Christ raises the little girl, only the faithful (disciples) and the hopeful (parents) are with him.

The matter is not one of magic, or "if you have enough faith, you can work miracles." The matter is one of pleasing God. Why should the Almighty work miracles for your entertainment?

In this instance, we can understand the matter as a negation of power:

- Faithlessness yields such results – for without faith it is impossible to please God.
- Wickedness likewise yields such results – for God is never pleased with the wicked.

(The word translated as "perverted" here is also translated as wicked, twisted or corrupt. Sound familiar?)

The foundation: the Atonement

I like this translation: "Let these words sink into your ears." Now that Jesus has our attention, he's going to tell us the important stuff. Preceded by such a demonstration of power, it is confusing to the disciples that Jesus tells them of his fate. The Son of Man, a term for the Messiah, is to be delivered into the hands of evil men, be crucified and rise from the dead.

This is not an arbitrary sequence of events. Christ is quite simply telling them of his greatness – for in the kingdom of God greatness comes by service and sacrifice, not pomp and pride.

Greatness in the Kingdom

An argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest. But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great."
(Luk 9:46-48 NASB)

(Other accounts give a great deal more detail of this incident; we shall follow Luke's treatment of it).

In the immortal words of the great philosopher Leo Durocher, "It ain't braggin' if you can do it." By his Transfiguration and the miracle his disciples could not perform Jesus has demonstrated his greatness. We call him "Lord" for a reason.

You may imagine, then, the reaction of the disciples in this. The debate is over greatness in the kingdom; everybody is jockeying for position. So Jesus gives them a visual lesson. He puts a small child on his knee – and uses him as a model of greatness. This would have been a shock to them, for children in this time were regarded as having very low status; sit down, shut up and behave.

Imagine, then, their surprise when they hear these two principles laid out for them:

- First, if you receive the least in the kingdom, you receive Christ himself. The principle is simple enough: if you treat my children well, I am grateful. God works the same way. And like me, if you are helping the least capable of my children, I am the most grateful. Simple enough?
- Here's the surprise: greatness in the kingdom of God comes from being the least.

How can that possibly be? Christ, our Lord, set us the example of the suffering servant of God. As we are willing to suffer for the kingdom, as we are willing to serve in the kingdom, we are imitating Christ. Those who are close to Christ are the ones who are great.

With us, against us

John is not finished with this argument on greatness in the kingdom of God. Perhaps he does not feel like being the least; at any rate he feels that somebody has to have the power to determine who is, and is not, a Christian.

John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us." But Jesus said to him, "Do not hinder *him;* for he who is not against you is for you."
(Luk 9:49-50 NASB)

- You can see John's argument. This business of greatness in the kingdom; surely you have to be *in* the kingdom to be great in it, right? Somebody has to determine who is in and who is out – and who is permitted to be great and who is not. And (surely) those who have been Christ's disciples on earth are just the people to do it, right?

It is an end run around Christ's declaration. If greatness in the kingdom comes from service, then surely we should pick who serves in what ways.

- Note well one thing: this unknown soul was casting out demons *in the name of Christ*. Christ is the source of greatness in the kingdom, by sacrifice, example and teaching. The disciples "tried to prevent" him – the phrase actually means that they told him to stop – because he wasn't in the right group. If we can't be great, we can at least limit greatness to our little group.

Christ then lays out for us the essence of membership in the Kingdom:

- There are "ins" and "outs."
- They are defined by which side they take: either God or the world.
- They are not defined by group affiliation.

That last deserves some explanation. There is a difference between "joining a group" and being a member of a group. Permit me an example:

In the United States there exists a rather exclusive group: the Legion of Valor. No matter how much I might like to join that group, I cannot. Membership is open only to those who have been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, or one of the three awards just below it: the Distinguished Service Cross, the Navy Cross, the Air Force Cross. One is a member of the Legion of Valor by virtue of such a distinction.

Now, the church is a similar organization. I am not a Christian - which is, a member of "the church" – because I signed my name on the rolls. I am a Christian because I have chosen to serve my Lord, being obedient to his commands. The sign on the door means very little compared to the Spirit inside.

Purpose: Seek and Save the Lost

The church is not an aimless organization, nor just a collection of nice people. It has a purpose, a mission:

When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward

Jerusalem. When His disciples James and John saw *this,* they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."] And they went on to another village. (Luk 9:51-56 NASB)

(It should be noted that some early manuscripts do not include the text in brackets. The point is, however, well known in other parts of the New Testament.)

Much is gained in knowing what you're doing. The concept of "Overall Strategic Objective" sounds very military – but it really is common sense. Know what the objective is; subordinate everything else to it. We shall see how that works here.

The Samaritan Problem

When Christ told the tale of the Good Samaritan, he chose the Samaritans for effect: his listeners would regard them as apostates, those who perverted the Law of Moses. You will recall Christ's meeting the woman at the well, when she asked him whether the Temple or the mountain the Samaritans used was really the place to worship God. To the Jew, Samaritans were people who twisted and ignored Scripture. To this background we add the offense of lacking hospitality – something in those ancient times which would have been regarded as a great insult.

The disciples react to this in a way we can understand. These people are bad people to begin with, and now look at this offensiveness! Since we have seen the power of the kingdom – and have thrown out demons ourselves – the disciples reason that fire from heaven is the appropriate response.

But Christ knows his objective: seek and save the lost. That's why he's going to Jerusalem; that's why the Cross – and that's why the mercy to mankind while there is yet time. This is known and true; the question is whether or not we will agree with out Lord.

Does this matter today? Tell me, what do Christians think should be done with homosexuals?

The Primacy of the Kingdom

May we take a little review of the kingdom here?

- The kingdom of God is built upon the foundation of Christ – his atoning sacrifice, his power and the hope of his return.
- Greatness in that kingdom comes by service, not by position.
- Membership in the kingdom is a matter of who you make Lord, not what building you're in.
- The purpose of that kingdom is to seek and save the lost.

It is to this kingdom that you, O Christian, are called. But please recall: there is a difference between "doing the right things" (listed above) and "doing things right." This passage tells us how hard it is to do things right in the kingdom.

As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own

dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luk 9:57-62 NASB)

May we put this simply?

- Count the cost. Before you proclaim yourself willing and able, realize the sacrifice that may be yours. You do not know where He will send you, nor to what purpose he will commit you. The command is "Follow Me." We do not follow a system, an ideology or a philosophy; we follow Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Who can say where that will lead, or through what perils He will take us?
- Seek first the kingdom. Make no mistake; if there is anything more important to you than Christ, you are not going to make it work. You are trying to have two masters, and it just won't work. Your heavenly Father knows your needs; put Christ first and you will be satisfied – and often astonished at how your wants fade away.
- There is no going back. You cannot dance in and out of the kingdom when it suits you. He will do all he can to keep you; nothing can pry you out of the kingdom. But you can walk out. If you do, beware.

"For not with sword's loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drums; with deeds of love and mercy the heavenly kingdom comes." It will cost you all that you have, all that you are. It will be first in your thoughts and actions, or you cannot enter it. It will point your eyes forward, and forward alone. It is the kingdom of God, founded upon the person and sacrifice of Christ. It is precious beyond price; it will cost you all, just as it cost Jesus all.

Carnival Man - Luke 10:1-24

If you dig into a family history, you can usually find some unusual and interesting people – some of whom were not quite as upright and dignified as the old photographs make them look. Such a man was my great-grandfather's brother, known to us as "Uncle Bud." Uncle Bud worked for a circus, which doesn't sound too bad today. He worked the carnival side, however – which at the time was considered distinctly less than respectable.

Uncle Bud was an advance man – the guy who arrived about a month before the circus did, just to make sure that everything was lined up correctly. For example,

- He would arrange lodging – not so much for the people of the circus but for the animals. The average farmer was not too thrilled with hosting the elephants, but somebody's meadow was going to feed them.
- He also made sure of what we today would call publicity – articles in the newspaper (carefully written by Uncle Bud); posters all over town and handbills passed out at various occasions.
- His work also included smoothing and soothing the local authorities. The civic leaders always got a generous number of tickets to hand out as rewards for favors done.

All this took money and (rumor had it) sometimes more persuasive tactics. The circus was often opposed by at least some elements of the church; there was always the possibility of the girl on the flying trapeze corrupting the local youth with her tight fitting costume (in a time when proper ladies kept their ankles and necks covered – and everything in between.) The job called for ingenuity, persistence and a distinct style of conducting business at the edge of the law. By way of example, Uncle Bud had at least five wives – some of them simultaneously.

Now, I had not noticed this before, but when Christ sent out the seventy they were going out as his advance men:

Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. "Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.
(Luk 10:1-3 NASB)

As we shall see a little later, they were to heal the sick and proclaim that the kingdom of God is near. Uncle Bud would have understood this clearly. What might have dismayed Uncle Bud was the manner in which Christ sent them out. It was clear to Bud that the advance man was entitled to such favors and perquisites as might be available. Christ did quite the opposite:

- First, these disciples were appointed, not volunteers. They are the obedient and trustworthy ones.
- They go two by two. One reason for this is that they shall be witnesses to these cities; a single witness would simply not be heard.
- But the big difference is this: they go out as innocents in a world full of hard hypocrisy.

Uncle Bud would have been shocked. Send out these innocent choirboys? In the hard world of the advance man? This Jesus fellow must be out of his mind.

Actually, Jesus understood this quite well. These men are NOT capable of doing the job, and Jesus knows it. They are outnumbered, to begin with. So Jesus tells them to pray that God will send more laborers. The shortage has not, to my knowledge, yet been cured.

Ambassadors of Peace

"Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way. "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace *be* to this house.' "If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. "Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. "Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'
(Luk 10:4-9 NASB)

Where Uncle Bud arrived with a bag of tricks, these men arrived carrying practically nothing. This produces certain results:

- It convinces those who see them that they are not "in it for the money." If you don't collect an offering, you must have another motive. And if you have no "bag" (as translated here) you can't take an offering.[59]
- It also convinces you that God will provide. He'd better; otherwise you'll starve. Making a public proclamation that you depend upon God is one thing; following through is another.[60]

And to each house they were to bring the blessing of their peace. The concept of a person having his own peace is somewhat foreign to us – but up through the Middle Ages it would have been familiar enough. We may look at it in three ways:

- The first was well known to the Jews of the time: it would be referred to as a peace offering. If you wished to settle a dispute with someone, a part of formally declaring the dispute to be finished was the peace offering. The Jew would bring his offering to the Temple; after the priests took what was their legal portion, the rest would be divided. This was a sign that peace now reigned between you two. One's peace was therefore an offering in hand; their peace was the offering of Christ himself.
- A second way of seeing this is in the concept of the "king's peace." Every man was said to have his own peace; that peace was greater for those who were of higher rank. The king's peace would, therefore, be the greatest. It was a crime to "breach the peace" - a phrase we hear yet today. This peace could be bestowed on various places; by so doing, the king (or other nobleman) declared that place to be under his protection so that no violence could be done in it.
- This passage also prefigures a concept that Paul amplifies: we are ambassadors of reconciliation. Reconciliation is a part of the process of making peace. These men were such ambassadors – they represented the Prince of Peace.

In whatever sense you take it, the advance man of the kingdom of God comes not to proclaim entertainment but the coming of the Prince of Peace.

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[59] The word in the Greek is used of a particular type of bag used by heathen priests to collect money as they went from village to village.

[60] A good example of the principle is found in Ezra 8:21-23.

Rejection or Acceptance

"But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off *in protest* against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' "I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. "But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than for you. "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will be brought down to Hades! "The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me."
(Luk 10:10-16 NASB)

One of the most difficult things for modern Americans to realize is this: Christ is absolutely serious. There is such a thing as heaven; there is such a thing as hell (though of course we don't use that word from the pulpit; a "Christless eternity" is the preferred phrase.) The very idea that accepting or rejecting Christ could be important seems to have been lost, even upon the church. As Vince Lombardi said in another context, "It's not a matter of life and death. It's more important than that." Indeed, it is a matter of eternal life – or death.

Therefore, it is no favor that we do when we soft pedal the Gospel. If you had a bomb in your house, wouldn't your friends warn you? If your dog bites, you'd at least put up a "beware of dog" sign. So why, then, when the stakes are eternal life, don't we at least mention it to others?

We're afraid of being rejected. Beat us over the head with a stick; we will be noble martyrs. Take our money to send the Gospel far away; it is a noble sacrifice. Speak to our neighbors? What if they reject us?

If they do, it's "nothing personal" – at least, nothing personal to you. It is the rejection of Christ and therefore the rejection of God. It's serious – but nothing personal. That doesn't happen too often.

But – suppose they accept what you say?

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."
(Luk 10:17-20 NASB)

Who is it that invented the thought that Christians have to be the most sober faced people in the world? Not when the Gospel is successful! Even if we're not the ones who are there at the moment of acceptance, it's still a cause for rejoicing.[61]

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[61] I well remember the day my wife's 89 year old father accepted Christ – after many years of talking with him, Betty's sister-in-law led him to Christ. What a day of joy that was!

But as you rejoice, remember just whose power is at work here. If they reject you, they reject Christ. But acceptance likewise means acceptance of Christ. It is his power that is displayed, not your own.

It is also good to know why you rejoice. It's not because you have somehow become someone special; rather, God is telling you of your own salvation – because you have carried the Gospel, you know that you are his child.

The Only Way

At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*."
Turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed *are* the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see *them*, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear *them*."
(Luk 10:21-24 NASB)

Jesus "rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit." Here is an attitude we can adopt with great benefit.

- First, we should rejoice in the Lord always. In ultimate things we are those who triumph with Christ.
- Second, we should do so in unity – just as Christ is in unity with the Holy Spirit and the Father.
- Finally, in all these things we should praise God – the giver of every good and perfect gift.

Just why this rejoicing?

- First, God has revealed the secret of the kingdom – and not to the guys with the PhD in physics. Why? It is his intention to have fellowship with his creation – and he doesn't want an intellectual elite controlling that access. He wants "whosoever will."
- Therefore Jesus has chosen the ones to whom it will be revealed. They have no merit of their own; therefore they must accept it as a gift of grace.
- A gift of grace – too expensive to buy; it must be given away.

Compassion - Luke 10:25-37

There are many good lessons in this rich passage; today we shall see just one – on compassion.

And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE." But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. "But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them;* and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' *hands?*" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."
(Luk 10:25-37 NASB)

Let us begin with a general observation: the church is not as compassionate as she once was. Much of this can be laid to the fact that our government structure has taken over much of this role, calling it welfare. But the Scripture remains as it is, and we may ask ourselves whether or not things are as they should be. In doing this we will examine three questions:

- What is it about compassion which makes it so difficult?
- Why should we, as Christians, be compassionate?
- How should we, as Christians, show compassion?

Compassion is

Risky

The answer to the first question is fairly obvious: compassion is difficult for us because it is risky.

- It is risky in the physical sense. The bandits of this time would often beat a man like this – and wait for someone else to stop to help him, thus obtaining another victim. There is the risk of physical danger in compassion; the guy standing by the road with a cardboard sign just might be violent. You never know, do you?
- It is risky in the sense of emotional distance. The Jews and the Samaritans hated each other. It's one thing to be compassionate to a friend. It's another to be compassionate to someone who is outside our comfort zone. It "feels funny" to be in contact with someone who doesn't speak your language for instance – especially when that person needs help desperately.
- It is risky because it implies entanglement – you may get tangled up in someone's life. That life may be very different from yours; you may not approve of that life. "Don't get involved" is advice that comes from experience. Getting involved entangles your life with theirs, and that is usually rather messy. You don't know how long it will last or what it will cost. Not knowing is a barrier to

compassion. It's a lot easier to make a definite, one time donation than it is to be compassionate in person.

Expensive

When we use the word "expensive," we usually mean that the cost is (to us) rather high. That's the case in compassion as well:

- Note that the Samaritan puts the man on his own beast, probably a donkey. He gives up his own transportation and walks while this poor fellow rides. Compassion may mean that we do without.
- Compassion almost always has its cash cost. In this instance, two days wages, perhaps something like $400 in our day. It's not that we can't afford it at all; it's that it's big enough to be labeled expensive. That's typical of anything worth doing.
- It may also have its cost in credit! This man told the innkeeper that he would repay him any additional cost. In our time, that's like handing him a credit card. Often enough in compassion we have to say, "I'll handle that." (It's interesting to note that the innkeeper, probably Jewish, knew that the Samaritan's credit was good.)

Heavy impact – on others

It's generally the case that we cannot complete an act of compassion by ourselves; we need the help of others.

- In this the innkeeper is involved. He might well ask the Samaritan whether or not this was an inn or a hospital. I suspect that he knew the Samaritan to be a regular customer; we put up with a lot for regular customers. We socially obligate others in our compassion; a real inconvenience.
- More commonly, we obligate family and friends. If you don't think so, what happens when your daughter brings home a stray cat? (Or a stray person, for that matter).
- One impact you may not have considered is the impact on your reputation. To show compassion in a socially acceptable way (for example, giving to an orphanage like the one we support) usually enhances your reputation. But if you do it in a strange way (there are dozens of examples, but let's suppose you bail out a friend arrested for soliciting a prostitute) you can definitely acquire a reputation for doing strange things.

Why?

So with such a price tag to it, why would a Christian do such a thing? After all, we're not crazy, are we?

Blessed are the merciful

- For they shall sleep nights. Most of us still have some conscience left; to fail to show compassion leaves a sting. Those who are merciful, especially in this matter of compassion, go through life with a gentle heart.
- For they shall turn enemies into friends. Many have criticized our government's rebuilding of Iraq; but let us see it for what it is – an effort to turn an enemy into a friend. The surest way to destroy your enemy is to turn him into your friend.

- For they shall find that God is merciful.[62] We know this will be the case at the Last Day; it is also the case in this life as well. God is merciful to those who show mercy; it is in his character and we will see it if we but look for it.

The Judgment

It is well that we review the Scripture:

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even* the least *of them*, you did it to Me.' "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' "Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' "Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."
(Mat 25:31-46 NASB)

It seems clear enough, doesn't it? Yet there are those inside the church building who will be among the goats. Just how is that done? How is it that we can hear the sermons on compassion and yet still miss the point? Here are some techniques:

- The first is simple hypocrisy. We sound compassionate, we recommend compassion to others, we pronounce our wishes of compassion on the poor – and walk away, feeling blessed by our piety.
- For those who require some action with it, there is always the path of rewarding those who deserve it – and calling it compassion. Not all right actions are compassion.
- The most common way is this: we have no compassion for the invisible people of our society. Ask a waitress, a flight attendant, a telephone operator: all will tell you that ordinary politeness is rare, compassion (even the stewardess has a bad day) is almost unheard of.

Passing it on

One final reason for our compassion is this. God is compassionate to us, a favor we can never repay. But we can pass that favor on, in imitation of Him.

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[62] Psalm 18:25

- If you think not, remember the parable of the wicked servant?[63] Our Lord makes it clear he expects God's compassion to flow through us, not be bottled up.
- We need to remember that this is NOT a fair trade. We get the compassion and mercy of God; those around us get only the compassion and mercy of man. If it were fair, it would be justice, not mercy.
- The high point is this: if we are the children of God, we should act like the children of God – in imitation of our heavenly father, who causes his rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

How?

Just how is this compassion to be shown? Is there a style to it? There is indeed.

In imitation of Christ

Consider how Christ has shown compassion on us:

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (Col 3:12-13 NASB)

Let's take those style points:

- Kindness. Oscar the Grouch is not noted for compassion. Those receiving compassion are often embarrassed that they need it; how much better it is to receive in kindness, rather than in disapproval.
- Humility. Compassion does have a tendency to inflate you; remember that only the grace of God stands between you and needing compassion.
- Patience. People who need compassion often got that way because of their refusal to do things God's way. Sometimes it takes a while for the message to sink in.

In practical ways

- Permit me the example of the poor man's cloak.[64] The example pictured here is that of a poor man in desperate need of money. He borrows from a neighbor – who (naturally) asks for something as security against the loan. All the man has is his cloak; both garment and sleeping gear. The lender is cautioned to return the cloak each night – having compassion on the man who would otherwise shiver in the cold. It sounds like it voids the purpose of security on the loan; perhaps it does. Perhaps it makes God security for the loan.
- Of course, we are to remember that faith without works is dead. Just what kind of works did you think James was referring to?[65]
- Finally, as a practical point of fact, we are to do it as the early church did – as a church community. Often there is no one individual who can render the compassion needed. This is yet another reason for the church.

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[63] Matthew 18:23-35
[64] Exodus 22:26-27
[65] James 2:15-17

Attitude

We so often have the idea that compassion is to be rendered with that slighting look over the top of the bifocals. Our Lord disagrees. Indeed, as Paul tells us:

or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.
(Rom 12:8 NASB)

With cheerfulness? Yes indeed. The early church writer, Chrysostom, explains why. In his day the church was responsible for all that we would call "welfare" today. As in the early church, deacons were appointed to handle this task. If these deacons went about with sober look they soon fell into either cynicism (these people are all frauds) or anger (these people are so undeserving). But the cheerful heart immunizes us against such dangers.

Compassion is to be shown sacrificially. We need to understand that we are working for the kingdom, and that requires sacrifice on our part. It is a small imitation of our Lord, who sacrificed himself for us. Go, and do thou likewise.

Finally, may I suggest the highest form of compassion – the act of devotion? The world will say it's crazy; others will ask when this will pay back – but the true Christian understands compassion to be a reflection of the very heart of Christ. May our compassion be the perfume we pour on the Master's feet.

Many Things - Luke 10:38-42

This passage is one of the gems of the New Testament. We shall see in it a hidden beauty.

Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up *to Him* and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but *only* one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."
(Luk 10:38-42 NASB)

Words

Every now and then you come upon a passage in which the study of the original Greek lights up the lesson. This is such a passage.

Names

Names, in the Bible, were not simply labels used to tell one person from another. They meant something, if only your parents' contempt for yet another child.

- The name Martha comes from a Persian word which made it into Greek. It means "mistress." It's very appropriate. You'll note that Martha had a sister, Mary (probably younger) and a brother. Their parents evidently left Martha in charge; normally the house would go to Lazarus. She is rather obviously a doer.
- Mary is a Greek form of the Hebrew name Miriam. Miriam, in Hebrew, means "rebelliously." We can picture Mary as the bratty little sister who always shoved the work off on Martha, then went out to flirt with the boys. She's figured out how to stick Martha with the cooking, at least.

Verbs

Three verbs are used to describe Martha in this passage, and in them is the secret of the lesson – at least at first.

- Martha is *distracted* – other translations use such words as encumbered, worried, upset or pulled away. That last is a very insightful translation. The Greek word used is composed of two other Greek words. One is the root of our word perimeter; the other means "to pull." Taken together, they mean "pulled away from the center."

That's instructive; for Christ is the center, and Martha is being pulled away from him by the chores of hospitality.

- Martha is also *worried*. This word is used in several other places in the New Testament, with both positive and negative emphasis:
- It's the word used when Christ tells us to take no thought for the morrow.[66]
- It's also the word used when he tells us not to worry about what to say when we're up in front of the judge for being a Christian.[67]

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[66] Matthew 6:25
[67] Matthew 10:19

- Paul uses it when he mentions that those who are single can spend more time on Christ because they don't have to worry about their spouses.[68]
- It's not always a negative; Paul also uses it to command us to take care of each other in the church.[69]
- He also uses it to command us to be anxious about nothing, pray about everything.[70]

You get the idea. It's not just having cares or problems; it's the mental load that this carries. It you're going to carry such a load, do so for God's purposes only.

- Christ then tells Mary that she is *bothered* (the NIV has "upset.") This word carries with it a meaning of a noisy commotion. You can almost picture Martha in the kitchen, things boiling over, fire going out, dishes dropped – the bustle of kitchen work. Other translations of this word include "commotion"[71], "noisy disorder"[72], "uproar"[73] and "troubled."[74]

The simple lesson is this: Martha is distracted by things of lesser importance. Mary is not. Score: Mary 1, Martha 0. Go forth and listen.

But things are not always so simple as they seem.

Hospitality

To understand the deeper significance of this passage, we need first to examine what was then taught about hospitality.

The God of Abraham

To the Jew of this time, the name Abraham would be greatly honored as the patriarch of the nation. He was known as the friend of God; he was studied as a great example for the pious. Abraham was noted for his hospitality; indeed, entertaining angels within his tents. Hospitality, then, would be noted as a great virtue.

The nature of hospitality

From the Bible and other records, we can see the nature of hospitality as practiced at this time:

- It was considered an obligation of a host. God sent a guest; only a fool would treat God's guest rudely.
- It was considered the right of a traveler. Notice that in his instructions to the seventy that Christ did not tell them to beg for hospitality; he assumed that as travelers they would get it automatically.
- As can be seen from Abraham's example, hospitality was offered with great formal courtesy.[75] Abraham's feast is offered to the angels as a little water and a piece of bread – the oriental courtesy showing in the self deprecation.

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[68] 1 Corinthians 7:32-34
[69] 1 Corinthians 12:25
[70] Philippians 4:6
[71] Mark 5:39, in connection with the paid mourners
[72] Matthew 9:23, referring to flute players at a funeral
[73] Acts 17:5, where the city of Ephesus is in an uproar over the silversmith's claims
[74] Acts 20:10
[75] Genesis 18:1-10

- When done properly, a bond of friendship develops between the traveler and his host. It is hard to eat together (though this was not always done) and remain enemies.

Moreover, Christ himself acclaims hospitality as a great virtue. You recall the seventy being sent out to live off the hospitality of others; you should also recall that he said that anyone who gave such a cup of cold water in Christ's name would in no way lose his reward.

The early church reflected this attitude, too.

- Hospitality was commanded – you never know who might show up.[76]
- Could it be a burden? Yes – but a burden we are to bear without complaint.[77]
- It was so important that the list of qualifications Paul gives for an elder in the church includes the practice of hospitality.[78]

Natural Motivation

One may always argue that the spiritual is more important than the physical, and therefore Martha should have known better. Good things in the spiritual realm are of profit for eternity; good things in the physical realm tend to last only a lifetime. More than that, the practice of good things in the spiritual yields greater gains – but cost us more in mental effort. (No pain, no gain).

If you think not, consider this: is it not the case in your own life, and the lives of those around you, that they will persist in doing good deeds physically long after they have ceased to do good deeds spiritually? In fact, we prefer to do good physically; we quit the spiritual more quickly.

Why?

- One reason is this: we're sinners. In the spiritual exercises (e.g., prayer) we meet the pure righteousness of God. We'd just as soon not bring the subject up.
- Another reason is that we feel unworthy. I feel good when I do something tangible for others; I feel unworthy talking to God.
- Finally, sometimes we're just too worried and distracted to pray.

We know, of course, that the "spiritual only" life is a fraud; faith without works is dead. If we let our prayer be the excuse by which we avoid the practice of the faith, we are indeed merely hearers of the word, not doers.

In short, dear reader, I submit to you that by all that she knew, Martha was right. Therefore we may conclude that what she knew (at the time) was inadequate. So what was it that she learned later?

The Supremacy of Christ

Let me put it this way: Martha assumed, implicitly, that Jesus would agree with her. She approaches him in the tone of voice that say he has missed something. It is sufficient for her to bring the problem to the teacher's notice, and he will resolve it. She's not asking; she's telling.

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[76] Hebrews 13:2
[77] 1 Peter 4:9
[78] 1 Timothy 3:2

Perhaps an illustration would make it clearer. Suppose we were obliged to hold our class meetings in various people's homes. As we rotated through the various homes, the lady of the house would naturally feel herself obliged to provide hospitality; she would also feel it only fair that others pitch in. Some would excuse themselves from the lesson, having other things to do, especially in terms of ministry (someone's got to watch the little kids.) Certainly your teacher would not feel offended at any of this; and this would seem perfectly appropriate.

So you see it is not a case of "listening to teaching is better than working in the kitchen." It has nothing to do with the teaching – and everything to do with the person of the teacher. This teacher is not Lord; that Teacher is.

So the issue is really the lordship of Jesus Christ. He tells the Jews of the time that he is Lord of the Sabbath – and remember that keeping the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments. Here is a man whose mere presence overrides the most sacred obligations of the Jewish faith. He is Lord of the Sabbath; evidently he is Lord of Hospitality too.

Mary's reaction

Later, near the end of Christ's ministry on earth, Mary is the one who anoints him for burial. She is the spiritual one; her service is an act of devotion, the highest form of sacrifice. The broken jar of alabaster symbolizes the broken and contrite heart, the ever acceptable sacrifice to God.

When Lazarus dies, it is Mary who stays in the house, and must be called to the Lord's side by Martha. Mary is the one whom the neighbors come to comfort – the one everyone knows will take it hard. Hers is the emotional side of faith.

Martha's reaction

When Lazarus dies, John's Gospel records for us that Jesus loved "Martha, her sister and Lazarus."[79] People are listed in the order of importance at this time; you can see where Martha is in Jesus' affections. Why? Because of what Martha now knows:

She *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world."
(Joh 11:27 NASB)

She is the first to make the good confession of faith – the foundation of Christianity. Our foundation is not "what" but "who" – Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

At the tomb of Lazarus, she is still the worker; she is the one who calls Mary to come to the site. She is the one whom all look to when Jesus tells them to roll away the stone. She is the doer – but a doer in faith.

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[79] John 11:5

Our reaction

Mary reacted to Jesus in her own way; emotional, totally devoted, wanting nothing more than to sit at the Master's feet. (Incidentally, the phrasing used here means not only at his feet, but also by his side. She's in the front row). Martha picks up the work; her devotion is shown in service – but it is grounded in a clear understanding of who Jesus is. In their own ways, each shows us what it is to love Christ with all heart, soul, mind and strength.

But these are not given to us merely for our amusement, nor even our comprehension – Mary and Martha are given to us as examples. The important question is, what is our reaction to Jesus Christ? Who do you say that He is?

On Prayer - Luke 11:1-13

Luke's account of what is often termed "The Lord's Prayer" seems somewhat abbreviated. Given the circumstances described, this is probably not the same event that Matthew records. We shall take it as it is given, for all Scripture is profitable.

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. So the sisters sent *word* to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." But when Jesus heard *this,* He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days *longer* in the place where He was. Then after this He *said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples *said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. "But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." This He said, and after that He *said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep.
(Joh 11:1-13 NASB)

Prayer teaching

It may come as a surprise to you: people need to be taught how to pray. It does not "come naturally."

But what does come naturally is the desire to pray. At first blush this seems rather unprofitable; wouldn't it be much easier to develop a schedule of sacrifices to appease the Deity? Worse, it opens us up to being changed by God! (And we know what little success we have in changing Him!) And both of these disadvantages are accompanied by the ever present fact that much prayer is answered in one word – "No."

But still we pray. Why?

- Because we want something.
- Because we fear something.
- And (sometimes) for the same reason God wants us to pray.

Ah, but just what might that be? Why does God want us to pray?

That you would come to know him

Is it not an awesome thought – the God of the universe desires that his creation know him! Just what about him is being taught here?

God our Father

The point is simple: God is "our Father."

- He is "our" Father – Christianity is not a solo flight; nor are you so important as to have him ignore your brothers and sisters.

- He is our "Father" – this is a family, with a rather autocratic ruler – not a democracy.
- He is "our Father" – this is the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God.

He is holy

This is central to knowing him: he is holy, awesome, righteous and just. His name is holy; we should not use his name as a casual obscenity. But there is more to it than that:

- We are not to give advice in his name unless it comes from his Word.
- We are to revere that name, using it with respect.
- In addition to that, the name is a sign of power; take the name of Jesus with you, child of sorrow and of woe.

That you would come to rely on Him

This just might be the hard part for intelligent, capable people. Anyone can see that the village idiot will rely on God. He has no choice. How much greater, then, is the Christian life for one who could be self-reliant – and chooses to be reliant on God? Is this really taught, though; could I really think such a think to be true? Listen to his teaching (I told you it doesn't come naturally).

Give us this day our daily bread

Doesn't this sound rather basic? It is.

- We are to rely on him *daily* – not just once in a while when things get out of our control.
- We are to rely on him for all things – even something as simple as bread. (You have no idea how much better my life at work became when I began to depend upon Him to provide in it.)
- Most difficult of all: we are to accept it as a gift. We do not ask him to provide; we ask him to give.

Forgive us our sins

- The translation used here makes it clear: our forgiveness is dependent upon our *continuing* forgiveness of others. The one giving us this condition is the only one who really has the power to forgive sin, for he is the one against whom every sin is committed. Only God can do this; that's obvious. That's also why our world insists there is no such thing as sin.

Lead us not into temptation

Do you know what you're saying when you recite this?

- You're saying that you know who is Lord of time and space, controller of all things. It's Him, not you.
- You're saying that you know that He is the best judge of what you can – and cannot – handle.
- You're are committing yourself to let him handle the thing – that he knows best what you can do.

It sounds rather humbling, doesn't it? To whom would you trust such things, other than God Himself?

That your will be shaped by His will

How so? Consider the phrase, "your kingdom come." How is this to happen?

- First, by proclamation. Somebody has to tell others of the joy of Christ.
- Next, by making disciples – both evangelization and discipleship. (Which is what we're doing here).
- Finally – by our example. Those who see us are drawn to the kingdom – while we are drawn closer in.

Your will be done

This is really simple. Give up. Recognize that you have placed Him in charge of your life. He will work all things together for the good of those who love Him – if they will let Him.

The hard part – persistence

All this sounds good on a Sunday morning – but what about Monday? Can we really keep this up? There are lots of good reasons for cultivating the habit of persistence in prayer; here are three:

- As your mother said, it will develop character. You will learn not to give up so easily.
- By simple repetition, you train your desires to conform to his will. This is an excellent way to stay out of trouble.
- Greatest of all is this: as you persist in prayer, you open your heart to his leading, each and every day. He can then be persistent with you.

Ask, seek and knock

Ask first. It's polite. And good manners are the lubricant of any solid relationship. Besides, you might just get it the first time.

Seek – or, don't just sit there. Do you honestly believe that he will give you what you ask for, if you don't show the gumption to get up and look for it? Besides, in the seeking, who knows where he will lead you?

Knock – don't snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. When you're getting close to what your heart desires, start knocking. Be persistent every day, all the time. Remember your example: Jesus stands at the door and knocks too.

The end result

It is a simple thing, prayer. But in it you seek great things:

- You seek to know him who created all things, and who loves you deeply.
- You seek his sustaining power, which is sufficient in every circumstance and all things.
- You seek to find your will – within His. You become a part of his kingdom, fitting better every day.
- Finally, you fulfill the purpose for which you were created: to glorify God.[80]

It's a life of joy, a life of peace, a life of love. Seek to learn to pray.

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[80] Isaiah 43:7

Self Reliance - Luke 11:14-36

Perhaps no society on earth (as of late) so clearly represented the kingdom of Satan as Nazi Germany. One of the clearest examples of why such a kingdom seems to prevail – and doesn't – is found in the history of Operation Sea Lion. This was the planned invasion of Great Britain. The story may be apocryphal, but it found its way into Bartlett's: When Churchill made his famous "fight them on the beaches" speech, it is recorded that he put his hand over the microphone and said, "And when they land, we will hit them over the head with beer bottles, which is all we really have." Contemporary opinion held that the Nazis could not lose; so how is it that they never invaded?

Let's look at some of the mistakes:

- The navy – essential to convoying ships over the English channel – was practically destroyed in Norway, a secondary campaign theater.
- The army never wavered from its demand that the navy put it ashore over a broad front, simultaneously – a feat well beyond the physical capability of Germany. They even insisted that all the troops land at high tide, simultaneously. As the tides over that front varied by about four hours, that would have been quite a trick.
- The air force refused to go after the Royal Navy – the core of the problem – but instead decided on an "absolute" air war. When they had the RAF almost whipped, Hitler decided to change that to a terror bombing campaign. The result? Both the Royal Navy and the RAF were capable of resisting the assault – which therefore was never attempted.

Why? Because all these leaders were jockeying for position and power – and thus saw cooperation with the other services as worse than useless. It's the way of this world. It's Satan's method.

Let us see this same lesson in the Scripture.

The Great Divide

And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute; when the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." Others, to test *Him,* were demanding of Him a sign from heaven. But He knew their thoughts and said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and a house *divided* against itself falls. "If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. "And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? So they will be your judges. "But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. "When a strong *man,* fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are undisturbed. "But when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied and distributes his plunder. "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters.
(Luk 11:14-23 NASB)

On demons

We must begin with a brief explanation on the subject of demons. Kindly remember that Satan is a liar, the father of lies. His lie to the modern world is that demons – indeed, all things spiritual – do not exist. Therefore, Satan does not exist; therefore the Bible is false. But to the third world he says, demons are more powerful than the missionary's God.

- Of course, he is greatly helped now in that demons are regularly portrayed on television. Sometimes they are evil, sometimes they are not – but our ideas about them now come from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* rather than the Bible. I leave it to you which of the two is more likely correct.

If you wish to pursue it – and I don't recommend that you do – start by talking with those on the mission field of the third world countries. The tales will enlighten, and possibly frighten, you.

The Kingdom of this world

Let's go over the basic rules. See if these sound familiar to you:

- *Might makes right.* He who has the gold, rules. I'm the biggest, do it my way. And – people need to be made to do things. Clamp down tight on everybody.
- *Authority ≠ power ≠ responsibility.* The guy with the power distributes it via authority; responsibility is below that. The most common circumstance is to have the responsibility without either the power or the authority to carry it out.
- *Man is supreme.* Everyone knows that I have the power to reform myself – if I just believe in myself strongly enough. Man is the ultimate judge of things. (Which is yet another great lie from Satan).

Seen this before? That's how it was back in Christ's time. Hasn't changed much, has it?

Now arriving: the kingdom of God

Remember that in this time anyone who could cast out demons was considered to be approved by God. The phenomenon is not at all unusual; now as then the interpretation by most people is simply this: if you have the power to throw them out, you must have gotten it from a stronger spiritual power than the demon. The only such power is God himself. Therefore, the speaker is "God approved."

But in this instance the speaker claims to be the Messiah; indeed, the speaker claims to be God in the flesh. How can this be? The others who cast out demons have a rather humble air about them; they acknowledge that it is not by their own power that the demons are cast out, but by God's. This man says he is God – and somehow still has the power. It forces the choice: either he is indeed God in the flesh, or he is the Prince of Darkness.

That's the great divide. Who is this Jesus? The decision is forced; you cannot have it both ways. Sadly, our generation replies, "Whatever." We are content to sit on the fence, honoring this Jesus without allowing him to really affect the way we live. We are the Laodicean church.

The Value of Self Reformation

"When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' "And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. "Then it goes and takes *along* seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."
While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed." But He said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."
(Luk 11:24-28 NASB)

Let me begin with a little human experience:

- How many diet books have hit the best seller list? Dozens, maybe hundreds over the years. If they're so great, why do people keep on writing new ones?

- Smoking. Did you ever hear someone tell you, “It’s easy to quit smoking. I’ve done it dozens of times.”
- Alcoholics Anonymous. While they’re not specific (any more; they used to be) about just what is that “higher power” they keep talking about, they make one clear point: if you don’t ask for the help, you’ll be back on the bottle very shortly.

The point? Trying to reform yourself, without help, is useless.

Oh, but that’s only for physical things, right? Think again:

- How many times have you had the same argument with your wife? (Sorry about that dear, and I have taken this to the Lord).
- How many times have you taken “invisible vengeance” – the rage of dreaming sheep?
- How often have you allowed pride to swell in secret – saying to yourself, “How they ever picked him I’ll never know.”

The solution

- The solution to self-reformation is to ask God to help. That help is both available and fruitful *if you will keep your eye focused on Him.* That’s the part that you can do (you focused on those diet books, didn’t you?). To make this work, however, you need to do two things:
- First you need to *hear* the word of God. That will tell you what to do. Listen to the sermons and lessons; read the Scripture daily; ask your fellow Christians how they do it. Make an effort to hear.
- Then you must *do* the word. Faith without works is dead.

Christ considers this of first importance. Indeed, his illustration here is this: it is better to hear and do than it is to be His own mother.

But what if I don’t want to do this? Suppose I’d rather do it my way? Surely God wouldn’t punish me for my good-hearted attempts at doing it myself, right?

Wrong. In a sense. He simply lets you do it yourself, working under your own delusions. That produces the inevitable consequences – which He intends as a stimulant for you to ask, “Why isn’t this working?”

OK – how do I know this is really true? Teacher, how about you passing a miracle or two so I’ll know that you’re really giving me God’s truth here. If you want the right answers, you must ask the right questions.

The Sign

As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and *yet* no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. "For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. "The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. "No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in a cellar nor under a basket, but on the lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light. "The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. "Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness. "If therefore your whole

body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays."
(Luk 11:29-36 NASB)

Well, maybe that was then and this is now, right? But let's see the symptom of a wicked generation – and see if it applies to us. It's simple: the wicked generation is one which seeks a sign.

What's so bad about that? If I'm looking for an auto mechanic, the sign I look for is that he can fix my car, right? Yes, but the mechanic is a man just like you. God is not.

If you look for God, you must be prepared to deal with him as God. You cannot say to the Lion of Judah, "jump through my flaming hoops." God is not your equal; he is Creator of all things. He will give you a sign, all right; it's called the Day of Judgment. That, by the way, is his to choose.

Can you not see that the "Me" generation will seek a sign like this one? If "Me" comes first, then God should do as I please. So give me a sign. "Me first" is the social equivalent of the Bible's "wicked generation." Now you know what's wrong with this generation we're in.

Compare yourselves

There's another characteristic of our generation which is very telling: anything that happened before I was born is unimportant. So the fact that other generations repented means nothing to me. Indeed, we as a society have driven the church so far out of mind as to have forgotten that there ever was such an example in America. But it has happened; twice, in fact. The first "Great Awakening" (for such it is called) started in 1689 with Jonathan Edwards famed sermon, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." About a hundred years later, approximately 1790 or so, there was a similar awakening which lasted at least through 1840, It makes interesting reading to see how pious and devout were our ancestors. As a Civil War history buff, it is astonishing to see the difference.

The real question: will it happen again?

Single Mindedness

In the meanwhile, we have life to live. The picture Christ uses here depends upon a Greek concept. They saw the eye somewhat like a searchlight. Failures of vision were, in effect, the searchlight going out. Christ uses that idea to explain the spiritual equivalent: your eye must be single, as the King James had it. It means quite simply single minded devotion to him – and also single minded reliance. Make God your first resort, not your last. As the Scripture has him saying,

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me."
(Psa 50:15 NASB)

The Pharisees - Luke 11:37-54

It puzzles some new Christians that the Prince of Peace met with such opposition. But, as we have seen, Christ places before us the Great Divide – and some will choose to be on the side of sin.

Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee *asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined *at the table.* When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. "You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? "But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you. "But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every *kind of* garden herb, and *yet* disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. "Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. "Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over *them* are unaware *of it.*" One of the lawyers *said to Him in reply, "Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too." But He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. "Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and *it was* your fathers *who* killed them. "So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build *their tombs.* "For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and *some* they will persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house *of God;* yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.' "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering." When He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, plotting against Him to catch *Him* in something He might say.
(Luk 11:37-54 NASB)

Brunch At Home

A little background is necessary. We know from the customs of the time, which were well documented, that Jesus and the Pharisee are returning from the synagogue after morning prayers. It was customary to go to morning prayer before breakfast; afterwards, a brunch. This is the meal to which the Pharisee has invited him.

You will see the word “reclined.” Tables were low and something like a couch was brought up to them. You reclined on the couch and ate by taking things off the table. Hence, “reclined.”

We must not mistake the ceremonial washing here with your mother’s command to “wash your hands before dinner.” Indeed, they would ask you why you’d get rid of all that dirt. Washing meant a ritual cleansing, not a physical one. You would dip your hands in a bowl, down to the wrist. You would then raise your hands, and wait for the first drop of water from your elbow. Then you would lower your hands and wait for the first drop of water from your fingertips. No soap required. The concept of germs still lies some 1800 years into the future.

Into the lion's den

We may pause here for a question: If Jesus so disapproved of these people, why did he go?

- One answer is that this is his mission – to seek and save the lost. If this particular Pharisee is a devout man, then he will be blessed by the presence of Christ. If he is a hypocrite, then he will be warned.
- Note, too, that this is a private conversation – not a debate in public. Jesus wants to give them the chance to repent – without having to do it in public. This is brunch with the poobahs.

The danger, of course, is that Jesus could be co-opted into the Pharisees way of thinking. Perhaps this was the purpose in asking him to brunch; they assumed that the young firebrand could be straightened out better in private. Little did they know….

Better left unsaid

Some of our best lessons come without words. By his actions here Jesus makes three points:

- As a man of God, he can go even into the hypocrite's den. Courage is a requirement for the Christian.
- By not washing, he rejects the additions of the ceremonial law.
- In so doing, he sets up his main illustration. His actions here are designed to open the door for his words.

The Center of the Argument

Jesus now goes to the heart of the matter. In effect, he says, "You think you are religious, but you're not. And because of the high position you have among God's people, your punishment for this will be far worse." He then gets down to specifics, announcing them with "woe to you."

Woe to you Pharisees

Why does Jesus pronounce woe upon them? Consider these three reasons:

- First, they have separated worship from service. They are diligent about all the ceremonial law, but do not act accordingly. Worship in the formal sense shows what we should be doing as service during the week.
- Next, they love the praise of men – above the praise of God. "Good morning, teacher" sounds better to them than "well done, good and faithful servant."
- Worst of all is this: they spread their insidious corruption to others.

Lawyers too

(One should note here that one of my sons is a lawyer. I was going to write a disclaimer about this, but it would never get past legal review).

The lawyers – experts in interpreting the Mosaic law – are the next in line. They even stand up and ask for it. Christ brings three accusations against them, also:

- First, by their authority they make the worship of God a great burden to others. They drain the joy from worship and service.
- Next, yesteryear's mistake is this year's tradition. For example, we have churches which refuse to use a piano for worship; the arguments of yesteryear become the dogma which today divides the body of Christ.

- Finally, they obscure the knowledge of God, making it difficult for ordinary men to get – while not following it themselves.

Message for today

All fine and good, and I'm sure those hypocrites got what was coming to them – but what's that got to do with me today?

Dealing with today's Pharisees

Make no mistake about it: this problem has not gone away. The Pharisees are ever with us; they are the enemies of the faith from within the faith. So what should we do about it?

- Recognize that the problem is now, not just then.
- How do we recognize such people? By their fruits. If their piousness on Sunday doesn't match their dealings on Monday, the light should go on.
- We should therefore be cautious about accepting hospitality from such people; there is the temptation to be polite and agree with them.
- The real danger is this: that they will co-opt you into their way of doing things. When you feel the tug to "belong" but know that it is not right, it's time to leave.

Self test for Pharisees

One thing is clear: these people really didn't see the problem. They didn't feel guilty about being hypocrites. In fact, it felt good! So how would we test ourselves to be sure that we are not going down their path?

- Do you love the praise of other people? Do you like to have it said that you're a wonderful Christian?
- Are you faithful on Sunday – but for the rest of the week you excuse yourself, saying, "Some people just don't understand what it takes to survive in today's economy."
- Most of all: are you always ready with good advice for other people? But have difficulty accepting it yourself?

The works of a Christian

By his condemnation Christ gives us a list of things that we should be doing:

- The first is simply this: giving to the poor. It amazes me how many churches see this as a low priority item – and how much emphasis Christ places on it.
- The second is similar, but more personal. We are to bear each other's burdens. If your Christian brother is in need, in pain, in sorrow, what should you be doing?
- In all your dealings, be just. Be fair. Never try to skim off a little extra, but provide all that is fair. Let it be said that a Christian would never cheat someone.
- Most of all: be loving. God loves us; we are his children; we should act like we are in his family.

Contentment - Luke 12:1-31

A recurring theme in the Bible is that of the paradox. There are so many things that are "obvious" and yet, paradoxically, not true. We find our lives by losing them. Christ explains the phenomenon here. Those who are diligently seeking this world will find it – and find nothing. Those who seek first the kingdom of God find this world wrapped in it.

Fear

Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first *of all,* "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. "Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops. "I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? *Yet* not one of them is forgotten before God. "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. "And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. "And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him. "When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."
(Luk 12:1-12 NASB)

You will kindly recall that this comes immediately after Christ's warning to the lawyers and the Pharisees concerning their hypocrisy. To understand why he would jump from the "leaven of the Pharisees" into a discourse on courage in public speaking, we must understand the effects of hypocrisy:

- It is clear that hypocrisy causes the evil man to hide his evil from prying eyes.
- It takes more thinking, but reflect on your own experience: doesn't hypocrisy also cause the good man to hide his goodness?

Hypocrisy is intimidating. One way that it spreads is by intimidating those who aren't hypocrites. So we must therefore deal with fear – in particular, fear of what people will think when we speak out.

Dealing with fear

The first thing we must recognize is this: there is no escape from this. Christ forces the Great Divide; you are either with him or against him. You have to choose: be intimidated or speak up.

That's important to our understanding of the question. Most of us would like three options here, the third being to get along and go along. But that option simply doesn't exist. Either you will find yourself speaking up whether or not you want to, or you will find yourself silent. So it is between those two options you must choose.

To help you make up your mind, Christ reveals some things you might need to know:

- First, if this is a matter of fear, just who should you be afraid of? The worst thing this world can do to you is kill you. God can do that too. He can also send you to hell. Sometimes it helps to know which bear is bigger.
- Next, everything is going to be revealed eventually, if only at the Last Judgment. All those secrets are going to be exposed publicly. So what do you want the Lord to see; what do you want to show to the world then? A sneaking hypocrisy or a life that was consistently loyal to him?
- If you don't become a witness for him, he will disown you.

God's care

So far it sounds like picking which way you'd like to get beat up – hammer or crowbar. But please understand that God knows that problem, and has therefore said that he will care for you.

- If you do testify for him, Christ will attest that you are one of his – on the day it really counts.
- Since you have fear in this world, he will care for you, letting his perfect love cast out your fear.
- Indeed, he specifically tells us here that he will give us help in time of need – in public speaking.

But sometimes it isn't fear that keeps us from testifying for him.

Greed

Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the *family* inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come;* take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry."' "But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?' "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."
(Luk 12:13-21 NASB)

More common than you might think

Mention the word "greed" and you will get some bemused reactions. Most people are of the opinion that they are not greedy; indeed, ask around: do you know anyone you'd call greedy? Maybe one or two, but most of the people you know are not greedy – by our definition. We define greed as a sin against other people – taking the bottle from the baby to drink it yourself. But greed much more commonly is a sin against your own soul.

That's why Christ warns us against "every form of greed." Let me give you three such forms:

- The simple desire for "more." More what? More anything, actually, but usually we see it with money.
- There is also the desire for "the most." This form of greed is not content with more; others must have less, as well.
- There is also the refusal to be content; "not that I'm greedy but…" Whatever we have does not satisfy; even if more is beyond possibility.

So often we see these. Spectacular greed is rare; but the greed of "just a little bit more" is always with us.

The antidote to greed

Greed afflicts people because they believe that "more is better." But is it?

- It won't help you when the Day of Judgment arrives – unless you gave it away.
- You can't take it with you; there are no pockets in a shroud.
- Even if you have great wealth, there are still problems.

Be on your guard against greed; it sneaks up on you. But what can you do to prevent it? Recognize the futility of riches. But there is an even better way.

Rich towards God

Money, after all, is simply a tool. It is one we pursue, but one which we should not let master us. The easiest way to stay away from this trouble is to put the right stuff in the right place. We need to be "rich towards God."

What does that mean? John Wesley put it in simple terms:

- We live in faith.
- We abound in good works.
- We are filled with love.

All these things God prizes in us; therefore, to have them is to be rich towards God.

Teaching the Disciples

Christ now turns his attention away from the crowd and back to his disciples. It is interesting to note that this seems to be something like additional reinforcement of the lesson for them. It's as if they needed an extra dose.

And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not worry about *your* life, *as to* what you will eat; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. "For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and *yet* God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! "And which of you by worrying can add a *single* hour to his life's span? "If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. "But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more *will He clothe* you? You men of little faith! "And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. "For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. "But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you.
(Luk 12:22-31 NASB)

Christ now puts things plainly. The parable is for the crowd; the explanation is for the disciples. Why?

- For one thing, the world can't handle it. Until they have the Spirit, who would be such a fool as to try this?
- For the other, there is no choice. This is the way a disciple of Christ must live. Nothing else will do.

So what's the big point for the disciples? Simple; don't worry. Why?

- Because life is more than the things of this world. It is more than another cold beer and a bag of chips.
- Because worrying doesn't do any good. You can't change your lifespan by so much as an hour with it.
- Finally, because God wants you to trust him. Worry is the opposite of trust in God.

Here's the test of faith: do you believe that God will provide? I can certainly testify that he has done so for me. He is able to arrange all things through his providence, and his providential care for me has indeed been gracious and kind. He knows what I need – which often is not what I want.

It is the Great Divide. Either you will trust him or you will go it alone. He will do all he can to move you to trust him, but always: He leaves you the choice. Trust him; and don't worry about it anymore.

The King Is Coming - Luke 12:32-48

It is a curious thing: much ink is on paper to definitively tell us what Christ tells us that even He does not know: the time of his return. Much less ink is used to tell us what we should do in the meanwhile. Perhaps we can touch on that in this lesson.

On Treasure

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
(Luk 12:32-34 NASB)

A friend of our family was in the insurance business. Being one of those poor souls who would have trouble selling anything, I asked him what the secret was to selling a commodity (life insurance) whose payoff was, by definition, after you were dead. His description of the technique was simple: "You back the hearse up to the front door."

Fear; the great sales tool. We use it to sell everything from mouthwash (aren't you afraid of having bad breath that night you meet Miss America?) to mortuary services (be prepared!) Fear looks forward – in dread. So we prepare to meet the future in the hope that none of these evil things will strike.

But – I must ask such questions, you'll soon learn to fear them – just exactly who holds the future? Perhaps we should be looking to Him for instruction. Just what is his attitude towards us?

- He is your Father. That defines your relationship with him; he holds your future. Doesn't that one word tell you that he wants what is good for you?
- He has already chosen to give you the most precious of gifts: the kingdom of God. It is not just salvation – it is the eternal kingdom of God.
- If he gives you that, why would he balk at giving you your earthly needs?

He does, however, understand you. Therefore he gives you instruction in this matter. To those for whom this world's possessions are so important, he gives an interesting instruction: get rid of them.

Sell the stuff and give the money away? What could God be thinking? We might look at it this way:

- He has provided us with any number of poor people. As Lincoln said, He must like the poor – he made so many of them. As these are his children as well, it is his good pleasure to relieve you of the worry of wealth – and at the same time care for the poor.
- The money, you see, is in the road. I am told that the proper procedure for dealing with a camel which sits down and refuses to go another step is to shoot the camel and distribute his load among the remainder. Perhaps he wants you to put a bullet in the burden of your wealth.

By giving it to God's children, you accomplish much:

- By doing this, you are actually lending to God! Be assured that he pays interest on it, too.
- At the same time, you give witness that God stands above your money.

- Which, at the same time, is witness to one and all that you trust God to deliver you in all circumstances.
- All this – and you triumph over greed at the same time, for such giving puts a bullet into the heart of greed.

And have you then gotten rid of the treasure? Well, no. You just moved it into heaven. Since your heart is in your treasure, can you not see that this puts your heart in heaven as well?

Recently, I set up a money management program for my mother. In so doing, I see her checkbook – and the priorities in her life. Your credit cards and your checkbook are excellent thermometers of your spiritual life.

Be Ready

The reason God mentions this to you is simple: he has handed you wealth so that you might do something with it. He's coming back some day, and will ask for an accounting of it. So it seems we need to understand the normal precautions a servant of God should make.

"Be dressed in readiness, and *keep* your lamps lit. "Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open *the door* to him when he comes and knocks. "Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself *to serve,* and have them recline *at the table,* and will come up and wait on them. "Whether he comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds *them* so, blessed are those *slaves.* "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. "You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect." (Luk 12:35-40 NASB)

One paraphrase of the Bible translates that first verse as "Keep your shirt on; keep the lights on." The emphasis is on the word "keep."[81] You are to be one who is always doing the work of God. You are also to be one who is always ready for his return.

Reward

It surprises some that Christ consistently affirms that those who are faithful to the end will be rewarded, as we might see it, by being invited to the heavenly party. We are to be the guests of honor, it seems – if we are faithful to the end. We are those who will be invited to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. But there is a condition for this, as we saw in the last lesson. If you uphold Christ in your life, he will uphold you. If you deny Him, he will deny even knowing you. But just exactly is this "Wedding Supper?" We know a little about it:

- We know that Christ is preparing a place for us. He does all things well; but we don't exactly have a detailed description of this.
- We do know that it won't be like the life we have now. We will be transformed at his return; the heaven and earth we know today will be destroyed at his coming.

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[81] One scholar learnedly informs me that this is the periphrastic perfect passive imperative third plural of the verb. I have no idea what that is; but the intent is that you do this all the time.

- What will it be like? We don't know – but we know that it will not be a remodeling, but the New Heaven and New Earth.

An Unexpected Return

We also know something about the time in which Christ will return.

- The watchwords of that time will be "peace and safety." Everything will be cool. Most people will consider the return of Christ to be a fairy tale, and laugh at those who believe. "As it was in the days of Noah," the world will see things just getting better.
- Life in the church will be difficult, not the least because of the "Man of Lawlessness" who is to come. Some have seen him as the Roman Emperor Constantine; others see the Pope or the papacy in general. These are just some of the theories, but the key fact is this: we will have religious leaders who are apostates – who deny the Gospel and its power while claiming its privileges.

Now you know enough to go on. Keep the faith; He will keep you.

The Leader's Burden

Christ now turns his thought to those who are leaders in the church:

Peter said, "Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone *else* as well?" And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. "But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, *both* men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect *him* and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers. "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know *it*, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.
(Luk 12:41-48 NASB)

So, what's the faithful and sensible steward supposed to be doing?

- First, let's be sure who we are talking about. These are the leaders of the church – the deacons, elders, pastors and teachers. These are the ones to whom God has given authority.
- The command is simple: feed the flock. Do it regularly. In other words, preach and teach the Gospel. Keep on doing it.
- As we learn from the parable of the Talents, we are also to work to have the kingdom grow – in other words, evangelize.

Taken as a whole, you can see in these the Great Commission. In other words, do what you're supposed to be doing – teach the Gospel, make disciples.

The unfaithful steward

- But what about those who are granted authority – and misuse it? Kindly remember that *no one* among us is given dominion over the church – that is reserved for Christ. We are given stewardship – it's like dominion, with accountability. Christ gives us three cases:

- The steward who deliberately misuses his trust – for example, to line his own pockets with the offerings of the misled – will be cut to pieces and sent to hell.[82]
- The steward who neglects his trust – no abuse, just doesn't bother doing it – will be severely punished.
- The steward who is ignorant of what he should be doing will be lightly punished.[83]

But remember: faithful in little, faithful in much. Those who lead are to keep the faith. As Paul told Timothy,

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly *and* empty chatter *and* the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"-- which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.
(1Ti 6:20-21 NASB)

[82] Direct and to the point? Rather!
[83] Which is all the more reason the steward should study the Scriptures.

Fire On Earth - Luke 12:49-59

The Jesus who loves the little children is often preached; the Jesus who came to set fire on earth, to bring not peace but a sword, is seldom preached. But that does not mean that his words no longer carry meaning or import.

Fire On Earth

"I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! "But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five *members* in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. "They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." (Luk 12:49-53 NASB)

Fire?

This lesson will soon touch upon end times; no area of Christian thought has such wildly different and bitterly held convictions as that. No doubt there is someone out there who conceives of this message as meaning a literal fire. To that person I offer my humble apologies; I just can't see it your way. Please forgive me – and tolerate me for a couple of pages.

Fire, in general, is interpreted symbolically as referring to the Holy Spirit. This interpretation comes, of course, from the day of Pentecost when tongues of fire were the outward sign of the Spirit. To generalize the meaning, we must recall that the function of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin and of judgment to come. Any man so convicted will hear the Gospel as it truly is: Good News.

It is this conviction which forces the Great Divide. The Gospel is either truth itself or a terribly malicious tale, deceiving billions. The two points of view are summed up nicely in Jesus' dialogue with Pontius Pilate:

Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate *said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and *said to them, "I find no guilt in Him. (Joh 18:37-38 NASB)

In our time there are two primary views of the truth; each with its own ultimate result:

- One view holds that truth exists independently of the existence of man. Man discovers truth, but does not create it. This is the view held by most Christians of most times.
- The other view holds that man creates and sanctifies truth. Like the umpire, they tell us "it ain't nothing until I call it."

This latter view is the position taken by most thought leaders of our day. From that point of view, then, we may determine what those people would like to do to the Christians in their midst:

- Since man determines truth, anything that proclaims an absolute truth must be false.
- Such people are dangerous, threatening to eliminate such basic human rights as abortion (to mention the most prominent example.)

- We therefore need to act against these people by all means possible – in the name of Truth, of course.
- And because we determine truth, those people can be subjected to anything from ridicule to torture; such treatment is right, because we know that it is.

(It should be noted that when the humanists persecute the Christians, it is a good thing and proper use of power; in the meanwhile, all Christians should be abjectly apologizing for the Spanish Inquisition and the Salem witch trials.)

The division is in us

What makes one person take one point of view versus another?

- One reason is expediency. We want something, and one view or the other seems convenient. ("I want to sleep with my girlfriend; therefore, there is no God.")
- Others delight in wishful thinking. Some variation of humanism (for example, New Age thinking) appeals to them because they would like it to be true. Since man is the judge, it is therefore true for them. Truth therefore has many shades.
- Others delight in cynicism; if they can't see, feel or touch it, it's not true (which eliminates, by the way, high school geometry.)

But some of us take truth as revealed (and discovered) and make the transition to faith. It is interesting to see how God has arranged matters:

- He has given us plenty of evidence – both in Scripture (which is the historical record of his dealings with us) and in life.
- But the evidence is not subject to absolute proof, as we would see it in mathematics. Faith requires the leap from evidence to belief.
- God has so constructed the universe that it tends to force the decision: believe, or believe not.

Faith, by its very nature, admits the possibility of doubt. But it also forces the decision; there is no half way point. And the division is concerning the person and office of Jesus of Nazareth.

Forcing the Great Divide

The Scripture makes it clear:

- Our love for Christ MUST come first, above all other things. All other good things are subordinate to this, and are instructed by it. (For example, my responsibilities in marriage are taught by Scripture, not just my experience).
- Because faith admits the possibility of rejection, some will reject it. And some of those will be in our own households. When this happens, we must decide which is first.
- The honor of rejection for Christ's sake is so great that God takes steps to keep us humble – he keeps this treasure in "jars of clay" – us.

Signs of the times

All this is interesting (I hope) but we must ask: so what? Christ provides the answer: the day of judgment is coming.

And He was also saying to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming,' and so it turns out. "And when *you see* a south wind blowing, you say, 'It will be a hot day,' and it turns out *that way*. "You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time? "And why

do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right? "For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on *your* way *there* make an effort to settle with him, so that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. "I say to you, you will not get out of there until you have paid the very last cent."
(Luk 12:54-59 NASB)

First things first: one of the messages here is simply that the average person is not blind. You should be able to pick up on the signs of the times. But that's not the same thing as saying, "I know when the Lord will return." Indeed, the signs of his imminent return are not to be misused or misinterpreted.

- They are signs to the active Christian – not to be interpreted by those of idle curiosity.
- The study of these signs is not meant to replace active Christian living, but rather are a part of it. A Christian of no works but plentiful reading on end times is no Christian – but he will receive greater condemnation for his knowledge.
- Despite all example to the contrary, such signs are not to divide the body of Christ, but unite it.

The sign board

So then, just what are these signs?

- Apostasy. The church will find itself riddled with all sorts of man-made doctrine, contrary to the clear meaning of the Scriptures.
- The "man of sin" or the "man of lawlessness" will be revealed. Many nominations have been made for the job. The most common one is the Pope (either the papal system, or a particular pope to come.)
- The great delusion will come too – those whose hearts do not place Christ first will have a new system of beliefs.
- Most people will consider the faith something to be mocked.
- There will be tribulation; the true followers of Christ will be hated by all nations.[84]
- Many will fall away from the faith and betray those who are still faithful.
- The Gospel will be preached to all peoples before the end comes.
- The abomination of desolation will be made – and there is a great deal of debate about that.
- There will be signs in the heavens – taken literally or figuratively.

There. You are now an expert on the end times.

Indeed, our Lord specifically warns us that we cannot know the times set by the Father for this. We do get some advice on the timing, however:

- He tells us He will return "like a thief in the night." In other words, NOBODY will get this right. It's going to be a surprise to most people.
- Before then, we will have wars and rumors of wars – perfectly normal, it means nothing.
- In fact, things will be going on just fine; he compares it to the days of Noah. No one, but Noah & company, saw the use for a boat. At Christ's return, only the true Christians will be ready.
- Only God the Father knows the time.

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[84] The entire system of Tribulation, Great Tribulation, etc. is not what this refers to. It means simply that persecution will come as the day draws near. Specific times and dates? That is beyond my knowledge.

In short, don't buy anyone's theory that tells you all the answers. It's wrong.

Preparation

Ordinary diligence

So, what are we supposed to be doing when he returns? Same things we ought to be doing now! But here are four things you might look into:

- First, you're going to wait – so wait patiently. Look forward to his return, but don't make it your life's work to know when.
- Do what God commands us to do – make disciples, preach the Gospel, help the poor and the sick – knowing he could be here any minute now.
- DON'T follow the experts in this. There are many conflicting views out there; strident partisanship is their hallmark. Have nothing to do with those who divide the church.
- DO encourage each other with the thought of his return. There should be a difference at a Christian's funeral.

Prepare for the persecution

What about this persecution?

- Expect it. Watch for it and pray that God will give us the strength to handle it.
- Whatever you do, do not return evil for evil. Prepare to overcome the evil one by returning good for evil.
- Most important: "take up the Cross." Acknowledge that God is right and just in this too. Bear with gladness the burden he gives you. Then when the heavy burden of persecution comes, you will know where to find your strength.

When persecution actually strikes.

What do I do when the persecution actually arrives?

- Like the early church, scatter. God is taking the persecution and using it to spread the Gospel.
- Like the early church, pray for deliverance. No one in their right mind wants persecution. That's not the issue; the issue is what do we do when it arrives?
- Like the early church, count it all joy when it comes. It means that Satan has found in us a foe worthy of his steel.

Worthy of his steel? Let the church walk in the power of Christ, and not her own riches and devices, and Satan will soon find himself overmatched by those who know they are weak – and therefore are strong.

Small Beginnings - Luke 13

Have you ever visited with a relative from whom you have been absent for several years? If they have children, it is a common reaction to say, "My, how they have grown." It is customary to have a teenager sit through Aunt Margaret's dialogue on how she remembers them in diapers. My point is neither Aunt Margaret's surprise nor her nephew's annoyance; the point is that sometimes we must look back to see how things have grown. That is our starting point today.

Why Me?

Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were *greater* sinners than all *other* Galileans because they suffered this *fate?* "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were *worse* culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." And He *began* telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, *fine;* but if not, cut it down.'"
(Luk 13:1-9 NASB)

The kingdom of God is a concept not often taught these days, though our ancestors thought it rather important. One reason, perhaps, for its disfavor these days comes from our changed attitude toward suffering. Prior to anesthetics, most people took suffering as a normal part of life, and a necessary portion of those in the kingdom of God. Since then, we feel that if pain can be removed, so should all our other troubles.

The common complaint

Christians today are accustomed to using themselves as the yardstick of "normal." For example:

- "Why did God give *you* so much?" I am an American, which automatically puts me in the top five percent of the wealthy in this world. But my standard for "rich" is typically just a little more than I have. (Of course, this is the sin of envy; my point is that the starting point is always "me.")
- "What terrible sin did *you* commit so that God did that to you?" With me, such suffering would be unjustified by my sin – but you always got what you deserved.

In short, my circumstances are normal. You're the one who doesn't fit.

Then it happens to me

Of course, once I'm on the receiving end of such things – particularly suffering – there is only one question: "Why me?"

- Most of us, in giving it some thought, will conclude that nothing we have done deserves such suffering. There must be some other reason.
- Christians generally take the line that God must be preparing them for some special task. This is a relatively modern view, but very popular.

- Most Christians of most times would not attempt to determine why; they would simply react in obedience. The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

Why have we shifted view in our time? Perhaps it is this: our ancestors knew that they were sinners, and on that basis any suffering was deserved. We have difficulty with the idea that we are sinners, therefore God must have some other purpose in mind. Would God really cause us to suffer for his purposes?

- Certainly if we have done something worthy of punishment, we can see the justice in suffering. But we feel that forgiveness from Christ should wipe this out.
- Sometimes we are indeed suffering as preparation. Most of us could tell of times where our suffering prepared us to deal with a completely unexpected situation.
- Sometimes our suffering is as an example to others. The universe is a moral place; violate its moral laws and you will suffer. Others might learn by example in that. (Of course, this doesn't apply to AIDS, ….)

What we're missing today is simply this: we deserve it. But still we ask, "why me?" God's way is perfect (even if we can't see it), so we ask why he would allow such evil to come to us. One reason stands the test of time: out of evil, God will bring a greater good. For example,

Medical regulations

And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your sickness." And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and *began* glorifying God. But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, *began* saying to the crowd in response, "There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water *him?* "And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?" As He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him. (Luk 13:10-17 NASB)

There is a very critical point in this passage, often missed: the synagogue ruler puts his attack upon this woman – not upon Jesus. It is a typical attack in that sense; the kingdom of God is not what the world thinks it should be.

- The kingdom of God is composed of sinners forgiven. The world looks for plaster saints rather than penitent sinners. There is the opinion that a person needs to be "good enough" to enter the kingdom. Yet it is not so.
- The kingdom of God is composed of those who suffer – even those who deserve it. The world thinks that God should relieve all suffering for his children – and they're mad at him for not doing it. But do you not see that if that were to be, the kingdom would be flooded with more hypocrites looking only for pain relief?
- Most commonly, the kingdom of God is composed of those who are criticized by those who are not in the kingdom of God. Everyone expects that God is perfect – but by our own standards of perfection. Perhaps he enjoys doing the thinking himself.

This ruler of the synagogue shows us the nature of the kingdom – by contrast.

- He sees the rules and regulations as all important; God looks at the heart of a man.
- He sees the formality coming first; God sees it coming later.
- He sees the Law as the source of righteousness; those in the kingdom get their righteousness from the Passion of Christ.

The Kingdom

So He was saying, "What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? "It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree, and THE BIRDS OF THE AIR NESTED IN ITS BRANCHES." And again He said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? "It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened." And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there *just* a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. "Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. "And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline *at the table* in the kingdom of God. "And behold, *some* are last who will be first and *some* are first who will be last."
(Luk 13:18-30 NASB)

Growth in the kingdom

Little is much, when God is in it. We need to remember how God makes his kingdom grow:

- His kingdom starts from small beginnings. In every place where the Gospel is new, the original foothold is very small. It may be simply one missionary, teaching the Good News.
- Its growth is organic, not extrinsic. It grows from within itself, not by government decree.
- It takes hindsight to see the growth, for it is day by day, little by little.

A good example might be found in Billy Graham's crusades. He started out as a modest preacher, shaping his talents in preaching revival meetings. His organization grew slowly – but now we see that the growth it causes within the kingdom grows greater and greater. The growth is organic; it comes from within the church as she reaches out. Graham brings no magicians with him. Looking back, Graham's record seems impressive – but it was all done little by little.

The narrow door

The "straight and narrow" is a phrase that was created in our language from the King James Version of the Bible:

"For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.
(Mat 7:14 NASB)

In the original, the word "strait" really means "narrow," as in the Straits of Gibraltar. But either way, the meaning is clear. Some of the people who think they are saved will find themselves on the

outside. This rejection is both terrible and final – and it will be a great shock to those who are rejected. Others – ones who are regarded as more sinful, less worthy of the kingdom – will replace these people.

The concept is not new with Christ. All through the Old Testament there is a recurring theme of "the remnant." Most of the people of Israel become disobedient, but there are a few left who hold to God's ways. These few – the remnant – are the ones who enter the kingdom of God. It's that way today, too. Many people consider themselves Christian – making no attempt to live as Christ would have them live. They are the sermon applauders – if the sermon condemns something they don't approve of.

Tell that fox…

Just at that time some Pharisees approached, saying to Him, "Go away, leave here, for Herod wants to kill You." And He said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third *day* I reach My goal.' "Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next *day;* for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *the city* that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen *gathers* her brood under her wings, and you would not *have it!* "Behold, your house is left to you *desolate;* and I say to you, you will not see Me until *the time* comes when you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"
(Luk 13:31-35 NASB)

Let us make no mistake about it: the kingdom of God rests squarely on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ. That sacrifice was no accident of history; it is "Plan A." In this passage we see the agony of Christ as he contemplates his final days here. He knows who these people are; he knows them from the very first days as a nation – and he knows what they are capable of doing.

Yet he loves them. If they would but repent, he would hug them close. He knows that this nation will reject him – and it pains him deeply.

We started this lesson asking the question, "why would God allow me to suffer?" Jesus could ask the same thing; God would answer, I suspect, with the same answer – so that out of His suffering God the Father would bring a greater good. Out of the rejection of Christ would come the kingdom; out of the rejection of the kingdom by the Jews would come the mission to the Gentiles. Out of these tragic, evil things God created his kingdom on earth.

The passage is a prophecy; some see it fulfilled at the Triumphal Entry. Others see it being fulfilled at the return of Christ, claiming that it will be preceded by the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. Certainly this was Paul's hope, as he expressed it in the letter to the Romans. Some interpret it one way, others, another. But this I know: the kingdom of God is here; it is within us; it reaches out from us. Out of this God will bring his purposes to fulfillment. If our suffering is needed for his purposes, who are his people to say no?

Kitchen Talk - Luke 14:1-24

Christ, it seems, attended a lot of banquets and wedding receptions. This, of course, does not seem reconcilable to the pious, sober – and particularly sour – attitude required of "real Christians." The truth is, however, that he was accused of only two things: blasphemy – and too much partying with the wrong people. His reasoning was simple: the very Son of God was here – isn't that cause enough for celebration?

He also used banquets, weddings and parties as construction material for his parables and warnings, as we shall see today.

Preliminary items

It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on *the* Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely. And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy. And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" But they kept silent. And He took hold of him and healed him, and sent him away. And He said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" And they could make no reply to this.
(Luke 14:1-6 NASB)

There are many good lessons in this passage; we shall mine a couple of simple things from it while hurrying on to the party.

First, a little background and translation help. Dropsy is the old word for what the doctors today call edema – a swelling of the body due to retention of fluids. It usually signifies something wrong with the kidneys, liver or other such organs. But is also would mean that the victim would be accorded a low social status – because the disease would be seen as God's judgment upon his secret sins. Such a person in this stratified society would have been accorded a place at the lowest, least prestigious table. Which therefore implies that Jesus was reclining at the same table, which shows you what the Pharisees really thought of this itinerant rabbi from Galilee.

To aid our understanding of these things, we need a little background:

- Guests were placed in order of importance – those most important got a place nearest to the kitchen, and got first pick of everything.
- Banquets were more frequent in that time – as there was no refrigeration. You gave the banquet this week; I came and stuffed myself. Next week it's my turn. Being paid back is a very real issue.
- With no wristwatches, the exact time of the banquet was always, "when the cook thinks it's ready." A servant would be sent out to gather the guests as the time neared.

Humble yourself

And He *began* speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor *at the table,* saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give *your* place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. "But when you are

invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."
(Luke 14:7-11 NASB)

It is difficult for most of us to underestimate ourselves. Puffing ourselves up in our own minds is a very human trait. This can lead to embarrassment when you find out that the wonderful person the speaker is introducing is someone else. So just what is humility?

- It is honesty about your self. It is not saying that you are short when you are tall, dumb when you are smart. It is looking at yourself honestly – and taking the facts about yourself as just that – facts. Not things to be proud of, just facts.
- If you measure yourself, you must have a measuring stick. If you want to practice humility, then consider what God expects of you as being the measure of all things.

Another quick test is this: who is recommending you? If the answer is that you are so wonderful that only you could accurately recommend you, then I recommend that you don't recommend. Let others praise you; let God lift you up.

You might well ask, "Why does God insist on humility? It's pretty obvious we're no threat to Him."

- Without humility you will never be pure in heart, for you will always be looking to feed your ego. Without the pure heart, you cannot see God.
- If you have humility, you are among the gentle and kind spirits – and you shall inherit the earth, as Christ says
- Indeed, more than the earth, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.

There it is: God wants you humble so that he can bless you immensely. God is love; love so great that Jesus humbled himself to the Cross. The example and the challenge are before us.

Banquet Rules

And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and *that* will be your repayment. "But when you give a reception, invite *the* poor, *the* crippled, *the* lame, *the* blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."
(Luke 14:12-14 NASB)

There is a very pragmatic test of your love for Christ in this. It is still considered socially graceful to return an invitation. In those days, it would have been even more strongly done. The thought of inviting those who could not repay would have been seen as a waste – unless you were sure that God would repay you for it. The Old Testament has many injunctions and warnings on this; so this was not a new thought.

But it might have been a new practice. Consider those who come to your parties:

- How about those who don't fit in your social structure? Those whose clothes are not fashionable, whose use of English is more than quaint?

- Perhaps those who "just don't fit in." The misfits, the outcasts, the loners – are they seen at your affairs?
- Worse yet, how about those who are a positive embarrassment? You uncle who repeats all those war stories, for example.
- Any others who could not repay?

We often think that those who are physically poor are not in our church. But you might look around. There are those whose lives are formed around the social life of the church.

You might think such people do not exist in our day. But they do. They're just quiet about it in front of the majority for whom money is not really a problem. They exist; they just need seeking out.

The reader will pardon my strange sense of humor in this, please. At our previous church, we had a lady who lived on the pittance Social Security provided for one who was totally disabled. She does not drive; her back is so painful that she uses morphine regularly. Such people often count their months in terms of the day the check arrives. It is not uncommon to be out of food for the last few days of the month.

My wife heard this from our friend, and she offered to bring over something for dinner. Our friend politely said that this would be too much trouble. Betty replied, "Oh, I could just bring some leftovers from ours." That's what she says she said; that's not what I and the kids heard. We heard "Leftovers From Mars." It's a family tradition that such meals are now described that way.

Wherever your leftovers come from, make it a point to share them with those who have little or none. God will repay you for it.

Excuses, excuses

When one of those who were reclining *at the table* with Him heard this, he said to Him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" But He said to him, "A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' "Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' "Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.' "And the slave came *back* and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' "And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' "And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel *them* to come in, so that my house may be filled. 'For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.'"
(Luke 14:15-24 NASB)

We're rather good at excuses; I suspect it's all the practice we have. Look at the ones given to Christ for the wedding supper of the Lamb:

- There is the press of ordinary business. Hey, I have a job to put beans on the table. I don't have time to help out.

- Some of us have good jobs indeed. Jobs that pay for new toys! I can't get to church this weekend, I'm testing out the Hummer in the desert.
- Sometimes it comes down to great reasoning: I can't go – I'm too busy taking care of my lovely new wife.

None of these things are necessarily evil. Some of them are recommended in the Scripture. But any and all can get in the way of your walk with Jesus Christ. The good is often the enemy of the best.

Will you now take a close look at the Master's orders to his slave in this passage? We usually see the parable as applying to those with excuses, but it also gives us an insight on what Christ expects his servants to do, explicitly in terms of evangelism:

- First, we are to invite the obvious guests. We are not to overlook those who grew up in the church and left. Round them up, by all means.
- Invite those who don't look like such likely candidates. The poor – those who have never seen the riches of Christ. The crippled – those whose lives have been marred by horror (e.g. incest). The blind – even the hypocrites are to be called to see. The lame – those who are broken in spirit, having given up. Call them all.
- If that isn't enough, go out and get the enemies of God – the criminals such as the highwayman or the hedge robber. Bring the Good News to them too.

To what purpose? To fill the house of God, to fill the wedding supper of the lamb. Those who were invited first and have rejected God will not be there – this refers to the Jews who did not receive Christ. But it seems a logical extension that those born in the church may receive the same treatment – if they reject Him. It is not ours to make that decision; it is ours to make his appeal to them.

Construction Zone - Luke 14:25-35

It is one of the oddities of the church today: a major concern is how to squeeze in time for Christ in a busy life. Our forebears would have found this ridiculously funny. Being a Bible quoting bunch, this (and similar passages) would have come to their minds quite readily. Let us see if the sense of Scripture lies with them or us.

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? "Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' "Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand *men* to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? "Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. "Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? "It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
(Luke 14:25-35 NASB)

It is important to note that this passage is addressed to the crowds, not just to the disciples. It is a discourse which is meant for those considering the call of Christ. In the end, though, it applies to all of us who are disciples, for it points out the terrible consequence of starting the Christian life and not finishing it.

Hate your mother and father

Christ often uses what is technically called "phenomenal" language – language which describes the appearance but also reveals what is behind it. The duty to love our parents is written into Scripture from the earliest times. It is a part of the Ten Commandments. So Jesus' language here probably startled his hearers. But the thought is not really a new one. Even in the time of Moses, it was clear that if your parents started to worship other gods, you were to show no mercy but stone them to death.[85] The love and worship of God supersedes the love of family.

But nothing else supersedes it. It is clear: Jesus is claiming the allegiance which is due to God, and God alone. It is another saying of Jesus that can only be reconciled with reality by knowing that Jesus is God in the flesh.

Indeed, another such point is that he claims to be the one who can rightfully say that you should give up your life on his behalf. Even if you place "you" above "your parents" – "you" still must yield to Christ.

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[85] Deuteronomy 13:6-18

It is almost the definition of becoming a Christian: you renounce your right to you, turn around (repent) and claim the privilege of being a child of God. You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore renounce your right to be you – and start being His.

Carry his cross

It is a common phrase in the older literature of the church: "take up your cross." May I give you just a few points on the subject?

- It says to take up *your* cross. Pick up the burden which God has been pleased to lay upon you. Do not select one of your own but accept the one God has given you.
- Remember, it is your *cross*. You are to bear it throughout this life, even to the point of death. You are following in your Lord's footsteps; you are imitating him. Remember, no matter how heavy is your cross, his cross came with the sins of the world. You cannot have a burden so heavy that he will not give you strength to bear it.
- *Carry* it – don't drag it. The verb in the original has the connotation of lifting it up. You should lift it up willingly; indeed, give thanks for it. Do not drag it about moaning and complaining. Rather, praise God that he has seen fit to give you such a burden.
- *Follow Him*. You do not choose your own burden; neither do you choose your place of service. Not even the Apostles were accorded that privilege. Listen for his call, then follow Him.

Building the tower

The tower here is the picture of the Christian life. It does not spring fully assembled; it must be built piece by piece. Christian character is a work in process all through your life. You are, in a sense, a construction zone:

- Like any other solid construction, you will need plans – which have been approved as being acceptable. These plans are in the Bible; you need only look for them. If you build without them, the structure of your life will one day collapse. You then must start over.
- Construction zones are a mess. You are constantly generating scrap wood, for example. To the outside world it appears that things are inconsistent – not the same each time they look. That's how you should appear to others.
- Worse yet, sometimes the Contractor has to tear down existing structure – and expose how it was built. You don't cover up termite damage; you replace it.
- You might not understand what the Contractor is doing. Often during construction you will look at something and see no sense in it. It is only afterwards that you see the need for things which later are not visible.
- One thing is consistent: diligent work is required. No construction worthwhile ever assembled itself.

In summary, be serious about the path of your Christian life. Don't just assume that you will become more like Christ; make the effort. Recognize that this effort will last through your lifetime, costing you everything you have and are.

See also the shame of not completing it – shame for you (everyone thought you were a real Christian) and shame you bring on the church (is this how Christians act?) Count the costs.

Fighting against God

(Side note: this is an interpretation of the passage which assumes that God is victorious, therefore he is the king with twenty thousand. Some interpreters see that king as representative of Satan.)

May I point out one of the great commonplaces of our time? It is the partial Christian lifestyle. It is the idea that I can "do a corner in Christ," as the decorators might say. The great fallacy of that approach is shown here: the king is coming. Christ at his return will demand of those who followed him their complete submission. Anything less than that submission is rebellion against God. That's the symbolism here: in a feudal society, the smaller king must submit to the greater – even though he has power, it is not enough. So it is that the partial Christian lifestyle must be rejected; the King of Kings is approaching, and we should consciously choose to submit – completely – to him.

Sadly, this point has been lost along with the hymn book. "I surrender all" was a common altar call; there is no equivalent in the simple praise songs of our day. Without that complete surrender you cannot be his disciple.

The great German martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, expressed it this way:

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his son: "ye were bought with a price," and what cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

Salt

Our Lord now takes a common example and uses it to stick in our memory the truth he has just taught.

Consider salt:

- Then, as now, it was used for cleansing, as an antiseptic. It is therefore the symbol of repentance.
- It is also used as a preservative – and thus it is the symbol of perseverance.
- When in contact with an open wound, how it stings! We may consider it thus to be a pain in penalty of sin.
- It is also very common and used as a flavoring in many dishes. It is thus the symbol of the commonplace Christian.

We are called the “salt of the earth” – thus we are to be a cleansing influence on the world. We are to persevere and show others the result of the life eternal. This is something so ordinary, so common to the Christian that it hardly seems worth analyzing.

But if you cease to be these things – cleansing, preservative/perseverance and the common flavor of true life – what good are you? You are indeed ruined; and like salt that has become polluted and useless, into the garbage you go. Remember that he will return and sort out the sheep from the goats. He is looking not for those who believe for a while, but those who are faithful even to death.

Eyes of Mercy - Luke 15

"The eyes of mercy are quicker than the eyes of repentance." - C. H. Spurgeon.

In this section of the Gospel we find that compelling story of repentance and forgiveness, the Prodigal Son. But first, let us see the context in which it is set:

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." So He told them this parable, saying, "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' "I tell you that in the same way, there will be *more* joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. "Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? "When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."
(Luke 15:1-10 NASB)

It is quite the fact that Jesus of Nazareth did not seem to care about the respectability of the people he talked to. Indeed, the Pharisees groused against him for what they saw as blasphemy – and because it just wasn't right for a self respecting rabbi to go to some of those places, eating and drinking with those people. But as Christ makes clear in this passage, his mission is to seek and save the lost.

He describes the lost in two ways:

- There are those that wander off. People who come to church, become disaffected and never really bond – but who still believe. It is our task to round up these sheep.
- There are those who are lost not of their own fault. Those who simply don't know any better; those who were misled – and then abandoned. It is our task to diligently find these.

There is a difficulty in this. Most Christians think of themselves as decent, upright folks – the pillars of society that we are supposed to be. People who know enough to avoid the brothels, bars and blasphemy. Yet Christ's command is clear:

- We are to search no matter where. There is no place so dark that the Light of the World cannot penetrate it.
- We are to search no matter when. Today is the day and now is the hour of salvation.
- We are to search no matter how. The woman lit a lamp and used a broom. If it takes car shows and rock-n-roll to bring them in, then so be it.

Lessons about God

We see here some of God's character. He leaves the 99 to chase after the one; he chases each of us, individually. His concern is for the lost first; the righteous are always with Him.

In the story of the coin we see something else. Remember, the sheep wandered away – but the coin was misplaced. It wasn't the coin's fault. So it is with many today. They simply don't know any

better. But God commands that we sweep diligently. Light a lamp? Can we see who they are? Use a broom? Perhaps we need to be more thorough in our approach. Above all else – diligence.

The result, however, is great rejoicing. A sinner coming home is cause for the party to begin. As we shall see.

The Prodigal Son

It is one of the most familiar stories in the Bible. We begin with the younger son.

And He said, "A man had two sons. "The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving *anything* to him. "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'
(Luke 15:11-21 NASB)

May we take this in three easy steps? Before, Changing and After.

Before

One thing is clear about this younger son: he rejects the way his father does things. The father is likely enough a hard worker; the kid is lazy. He wants to party without have to work to earn it. This form of rebellion hasn't gone away. I'm reminded of Dennis the Menace running away from home – and asking his mother to drive him.

Sin is at its very root rebellion against God – a rejection of the things God intends. It is a curious thing: we rebel against the commands gives us for our own good – and then complain when suffering results. God uses pain and suffering for his purposes. It is very inconvenient to those of us who feel we have to do it our way.

Change

The prodigal now comes to his senses. We may discern three things of use:

- First, his thoughts give rise to action. He could have wallowed in self-pity, promising God to become much wiser. Sometimes we think that as long as we repent in our minds, that's all God could want. It is not so; repentance must lead to action, or it is just a dream.
- Second, notice that this is a rational decision. The boy reasons from the facts. There is no sense that an emotional altar call is involved; he reasons logically about his situation. That is what is meant by "coming to his senses."

- Finally, his decision tells us again that we are not self-sufficient – and the more we try to be, the more God makes it clear we cannot.

After

It's an interesting parallel: the view the prodigal takes of his father, and the view many of us have – or had – of God. The prodigal thinks that his father will deal with him in the way he deserves. We know that God will punish us if we ever repent, right? No, God is merciful.

So the boy prepares "the speech". We get the full picture. He makes two points:

- The sin is not just against his father – but also "against heaven." All sin is offensive to God.
- There is a rejection of any thought that by his repentance he has earned a place at the family breakfast table. On the contrary, he has humbled himself.

The Father

This is an extraordinary picture of God:

"So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.
(Luke 15:20-24 NASB)

The eyes of mercy are quicker than the eyes of repentance indeed. Do you not see that the father sees his son a long way off – and therefore must have been looking for him? It is that way with God; long before we see him by faith, he is looking after us. Indeed, as many of us could verify, God is often dealing with us by his favor long before we recognized it.

His way is even more remarkable for this: he does not send the uninvolved to repair the family; he comes himself. Indeed, in all the Scripture there is only one place where God is pictured as running – right here. Consider how great his mercy must be, if he sees the prodigal returning and then runs to meet him. This is the attitude God wants.

The party

Notice one thing: the party is dad's idea. There is more rejoicing in heaven for the one than for the 99. Indeed, the "worthiness" of the son is not even mentioned – by anyone but the son. Dad puts the ring on the finger, sandals on the feet, new clothes for the rags and then orders up the party. In short, he showers upon this undeserving son all the blessings that a happy father can bestow. His son is home; his heart is glad of it.

The Older Brother

"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. "And he summoned one of the servants and *began* inquiring what these things could be. "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the

fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and *began* pleading with him. "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and *yet* you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and *was* lost and has been found.'"
(Luke 15:25-32 NASB)

There is an interesting comparison to be made between the two brothers. One thing is clear: they both are self-centered. The older brother is bent out of shape, and we should examine his motives and complaints:

- His big complaint is that he's been treated unfairly. Remember the laborers in the vineyard? He's born the work, the kid had all that fun. It's not fair. He's right, it isn't. Mercy is never justice. To complain of this misses the point entirely.
- He holds an overestimate of his own worth. He sees himself as the loyal worker – one who never got anything he didn't work for. Generosity is seen as foolishness; good things are to be earned. And those who do so are obviously worthy people. Self made men are often do it yourself kits.
- He holds his brother in contempt; he blames him for this injustice.

In short, he's self-righteous.

Father's reply

May I point out one little fact that is often overlooked? The father runs to meet the younger son – he also goes out to meet the older son. He's treating them both as sinners.

The older brother knows that it's all his kid brother's fault. Dad knows it too; it's just that he chooses to ignore it. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Summa

What may we say at the end of this?

- What's wrong is still wrong; nothing here erases the sin – but forgiveness is ready for this sinner.
- It is a gift from God – which we should imitate. Hate the sin, love the sinner.
- There is no thought whatever on how to deal with a sinner who is not repentant.
- But the father runs to the repentant – even to the repentant self-righteous.

Poor Management - Luke 16:1-15

It seems that the ancients were plagued with poor management technique just like we are – and for much the same reasons.

Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and this *manager* was reported to him as squandering his possessions. "And he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. 'I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.' "And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he *began* saying to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' "And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' "Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He *said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' "And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings. "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the *use of* unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true *riches* to you? "And if you have not been faithful in *the use of* that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.
(Luk 16:1-15 NASB)

The Unjust Steward

We should begin with this: the parable is taught to Jesus' disciples – not the crowd, not the Pharisees. We may therefore take its meaning to apply to ourselves, for all Scripture is profitable – how much more, then, when it is addressed to us?

The parable explained

In this dark parable we may make certain identifications:

- The rich man represents God, who owns all things.
- The manager (steward, in older translations) represents us.
- The other debtors are other sinners like ourselves.

Now we can begin to see the parable's meaning. We are, like this manager, stewards over what God has given us. This might be money, other riches, talent, time – all that God has provided. Stewards are held accountable for their trust. Eventually the day comes when we will no longer manage those things – for death will take them from us. After death, the judgment; so our accountability audit is simply deferred.

What is the manager to do? Management largely consists of evaluating the options and (very seldom) picking one. This manager runs true to form; in his evaluation he gives no thought for his master; everything is based on what's best for him. So it is that Christ is appealing to us to do what is best for us. It's just that we have a different idea about "what's best." He examines his options:

- It faintly occurs to him that he might try manual labor. A look in the mirror convinces him that this is not going to work. Indeed, in this parable we see that our works alone will not lead us to God's kingdom.
- Of course, having reached such a height, being a beggar is not something he even wants to contemplate, for all who passed by would soon know why he is begging. Pride prevents this option; a warning to us, too. Those who live in pride should know that God humbles the proud.
- But he sees a third option: He will give his master's debtors a break. They'll know who their friend is, and he can survive on the banquet circuit.
- At this point the story troubles many Christians. The master (who represents God) *praises* the unjust steward – for his shrewdness! Would God do the same with us?

I submit that he will:

- We see the unjust steward as a wicked man, as compared to ourselves. We would see his actions as defrauding his master.
- God sees it differently. Both the steward and the debtors are sinners; not one is righteous. All that exists is his; we are his stewards.
- Note that the praise is for his shrewdness. Christ is not commending business fraud.

Now we can examine the punch line: if this is how the unjust steward obtained praise from his master, what should we do with the things God has given us? Should we not use them in securing things eternal? Indeed, Christ's command is quite clear on the point. God holds us responsible for our actions. Over and again the Scripture tells us that God rewards those who help the poor. Here, he reminds us that some of those poor will be rich in the kingdom – and it never hurts to have such powerful friends.

On Faithfulness

Your mother was right; character counts. If you are faithful in little, you are faithful in much. Character is tested in small things. There is a reason why your parents taught you manners along with right and wrong. Good manners are the sign of a gracious heart.

Our supreme example of this is Jesus Christ himself. Consider how he descended to our level. He through whom all things were created comes to us as one of us. And what example did he set for us? In all things he did his Father's will. Even in the form of man, trivial to him, he is diligent.

The counter example is Judas. The man who pilfered the money bag entrusted him by the disciples is the man who would sell his Lord for 30 pieces of silver. The issue is not about money; the issue is, are you a faithful and righteous steward of what God has given you?

It boils down to this: God gave you talent, the circumstance around you and all things material. He expects you to do two things:

- He expect you to *do things right*. In whatever worldly endeavors you are in, you are to be the one who does the job right.

- He expects you to *do the right things*. As matters arise, he expects you to be so devoted to him that only his choice occurs in your mind.

Faithful in unrighteous, faithful in righteous

Have you ever wondered why it is that some people just seem to have all the blessings and others get the rocky road? There are several reasons for that; but one which is key for adults is this: what would you do with them?

- Why would he trust you with money when he knows you will spend it unwisely? And is it not the case that when you spend it unwisely, you go broke? (Which came first, the chicken or the egg?)
- Ask the same question about your job; why is it that some people get a good job and others don't?
- The same thing can be asked about other possessions.

If you can't handle the worldly things in a Godly way, why would God entrust you with anything in the way of righteousness?

We are so often taken in by the "If I had a billion dollars, I would…" No you wouldn't. You'd spend it pretty much like you do today. Indeed, what about those things that money can't buy?

- Why would he entrust a loving wife and obedient children to one who does not love his neighbor and refuses to obey God's commandments?
- Why would he work his providence for our blessing if we do not honor him?
- Indeed, would he give you the privilege of serving in his church, his kingdom, if you have shown yourself incapable?

He pursues this theme with us. If you have not been faithful in handling the affairs of others, how can you be expected to be given wealth of your own? We recognize this in our children. When they are young, we trust them with very little; when grown, they may inherit. But there is a use for a spendthrift trust. So how do we perform this trick? I give you three examples:

- Like Moses, be humble.
- Like Solomon, ask for wisdom
- Like Christ, do the Father's will.

The question of lordship

If this is the case, how come all Christians aren't driving Mercedes? I submit that the answer is a question of lordship. Human beings do not feel right without a goal, without a purpose. We were designed to serve a purpose. So which one do you serve?

Yourself

Most would tell you that being your own master is the most desirable. (Think of Henley's Invictus: "I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul.") This one is easy – for a while. It does have a couple of disadvantages; first, it is greatly dependent upon other people NOT doing the same. The trick is to be the only one with such a view when all the others are looking for a leader. Then it can be very satisfying. But there is a grave danger in this: you might not be so wise as you think you are – and then you'd have to go get help in setting your directions. That's why this lordship is easy to subvert into the lordship of the world.

The World

We rather quickly find that being our own lord does not produce the desired results. We soon find that all the others using this method see no reason to allow you to succeed. And they have the power to prevent it. This is why so many books are written on the subject of how to achieve your worldly dreams. Titles like, "How to make any woman love you" or "The Road to riches quickly" sell very nicely. The disadvantage is simply this. You get suckered into doing things which gradually – but very surely – turn your desires into your lord. First the flesh, then the worldly things and if needed pride. Ultimately this leads you the illusion of control and the reality of slavery.

Christ

Christ's way is the one that works. It looks rather difficult when you hear about it; it does not promise the things of this world in abundance – but Christ promises you life abundantly. What does this lord ask of you? All things; all that you are, all that you were, all that you could be. What does this lord give to you? Abundant life here and now, life eternal as well. Indeed, in this world he tells you that you will indeed do things right, and do them rightly.

You are going to have a lord in your life. I suggest you pick the one who loves you.

On Divorce - Luke 16:16-18

It is a rather short passage, stuck between two important discourses. It is rarely given any great thought – especially today, when such teaching seems so irrelevant. But we need to examine it; it is just possible that the church fathers from the first century up until now were right; maybe it's the modern church that's wrong.

"The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail. "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.
(Luk 16:16-18 NASB)

The teaching is so plain, so clear and given so often that only the modern church dares say that it is no longer valid. Here, in a powerful passage, Christ not only teaches against it – he connects that teaching to the completeness of God's law, making it something timeless. It is also something that was well received in his time (when women were slightly better treated than cattle). Let us first examine the rationale used by the modern church to wipe this eternal command from its books:

- "It's cultural." The idea here is that the church was trying to present an acceptable image to a society which held women to be inferior to men. The church does, in fact, teach to the contrary of that. But so that the men of that time might more readily listen to the call of Christ, the early church told women to be silent and submissive. We're no longer in that culture; our society proclaims equality; therefore this is no longer a requirement.
- "We have modern technology." The theory here is that the invention of the birth control pill (and other forms of contraception) have taken away the need to protect women from becoming pregnant, falling out of favor with their husbands and being rejected. They can now file for divorce, and what a good thing that is.
- "You just don't understand." How can a guy who is married to your wife, has all that success in marriage, understand the problem that caused me to divorce Attila the Hun?

As against these weighty arguments, I have no defense – except the plain sense of the Scripture itself. I submit to you that the Bible teaches these three things:

- Marriage is intended by God to last "as long as we both shall live." There is no sense that trading partners is good. Even when polygamy flourished, divorce was still looked on as being bad.
- Anyone who married someone who had divorced (for any reason other than adultery) commits adultery. Separation is permitted for many reasons; divorce has only one justification.
- In that marriage, the wife is in submission to her husband. Therefore, the husband is charged with grave responsibility.

How we know and distinguish this comes from the Scriptures themselves.

The Model of Marriage

To understand why this must be so, we must first see how God views marriage. He has given us a model for that marriage; Christ's relationship with the church. But let's take this step by step.

Why we need a model

Why do we need a model? Wouldn't a list of do's and don'ts be much easier? Not really. Marriage is a complicated thing; human minds, when faced with such complications, tend to develop a mental model to guide them.

It also helps in repentance. To think, "Would Christ treat the church the way I just treated my wife?" is much more powerful than violating rule 32.

There is one other advantage. If our marriage is a solid, happy one, then it becomes much easier to see the love that Christ has for the church.

What is the model?

- In the Old Testament, it is the relationship between God and Israel. Throughout the Old Testament we see Israel portrayed as the unfaithful wife of the loving husband, God. The book of Hosea shows us that God actually had one of his prophets marry a prostitute – so that Hosea and his wife would be the living picture of God's design.
- In the New Testament, it is the relationship between Christ and the church. Interestingly, this relationship cuts both ways again.

Why would God create things this way?

The very idea that God has a purpose for us in marriage is no longer taught; it's just something that happens when you fall in love. But He does:

- His desire is for the faith to be passed on through Godly children.[86]
- It is also given so that the man's sexual desires will have fulfillment – to prevent him from sinning.[87]
- It is also to be the living model, teaching us the love that Christ has for his church.[88]

What went wrong?

How is it that we, as a church, no longer believe that divorce is wrong?[89]

- We now preach and teach that the husband and wife are equal partners in marriage. A partnership must have a senior partner – if it is to survive very long. Otherwise, when two equals argue, the partnership starts to dissolve. When there is a senior partner, then decisions can be made.
- We no longer preach against divorce, in any form. Only occasionally will you hear preaching against adultery. (Think this is your preacher's fault? Ask yourself what your congregations reaction would be. Preachers have to aim for where your heart is, not where it ought to be.)
- We no longer teach a wife's submission to her husband – which means we no longer teach the husband's duty to his wife. We have plenty of pop psychology to teach – but no real doctrine is left. Doctrine is imperative; psychology is merely indicative. We not only don't teach it; we teach that it is wrong.

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[86] Malachi 2:14-16
[87] 1 Corinthians 7:1-9
[88] See Ephesians 5
[89] As ever, kindly note that the preacher is not the church – we are. I'm speaking of what most Christians believe and practice.

The Sparking Point

The core of the issue today is the concept of a woman's submission to her husband. Divorce is much less frequent in societies where women are in submission to their husbands. It's virtually unknown in Christian marriages where the man takes his authority (which is to say, his responsibilities) seriously. We may note the points of the debate:

- The Scripture commands it.[90] The world at large – and often the church too – considers such a situation to be irreconcilable differences, and thus grounds for divorce.
- The Scripture also portrays it.[91] The portrayal of the ideal wife today is superwoman, crushing men underneath her five inch heels. The ideal wife today is a very angry, bitter woman.
- We have rejected it – largely through pride. When was the last time you heard a bride promise to "love, honor and obey?" Women wanted to be just like men – so Satan introduced them to the besetting sin of men, which is pride. It is no wonder that pride is now considered a virtue.

The results in the home have been devastating. We now have a higher divorce rate in the evangelical churches than we do in the secular world. The effects on children of divorce are seen in our juvenile crime rate. All this goes unmentioned from the pulpit. We simply don't want to hear it.

Submission and Authority/Responsibility

So just what should the marriage relationship look like? Let us indeed consider the relationship of Christ and the church:

- First, the relationship is one of love and forgiveness. In no sense does Christ "lord it over" the church in arrogance; rather we know "softly and tenderly Jesus is calling."
- The relationship is one of self-sacrifice – on both sides, of course, but Christ loved us first.
- Christ's guidance to the church starts with loving correction – the kind of encouragement you give out when you coach a Little League team.

Let's take a few examples from Christ and ask, "Just exactly how should a man love his wife?"

- Christ on the cross heard the jeers of the crowd. Some of those people would soon become Christians. Even before they were Christians, he asked for their forgiveness.
- Christ atoned for the sin of the world; he took the punishment we should have for it.
- Try as you like, you will find no trace of harshness in Christ, except for the hypocrites.

How do these instruct the husband today?

- When your wife is screaming at you, do you scream back, in self defense? Or do you give the soft answer that turns away wrath? If you are truly the authority in your marriage, you can do that. If she's an equal, you have to yell back, calling name for name.
- It is always your fault. It happened on your watch. Take responsibility for it and get it fixed.
- Whatever else you do, be gentle with your wife. A woman can easily love a gentle man.

You will note that this section has largely been addressed to the husband. He's in charge, or should be. But there is an interesting point here. Suppose your wife doesn't want to be in submission. You can cause her to be just that; if you do it by gentleness, kindness and love. What woman, having

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[90] Ephesians 5:21 ff
[91] Genesis 3:16 for instance.

such a husband, would find him to be a burden? We call it "women's liberation;" it seems to be accompanied by men's casting off their responsibilities.

Things to go home with you

- Your marriage should be a portrayal – to you, your spouse and your children – of Christ's great love for the church. This is the model you are to live up to.
- The love of Christ for the church is the model for the way a man brings his wife into submission to him, particularly in forgiveness and gentleness. There is no element of force or bribery to it.
- God hates divorce; the way we deal with it is first to prevent it. We then as a church must stand against it.

Two Rich Men - Luke 16:19-31

(The reader on the web will please note that there is a longer treatment of this subject in our study on Wealth and Poverty.)

The passage is a familiar one:

"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and *saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us.' "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house-- for I have five brothers--in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' "But Abraham *said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"
(Luk 16:19-31 NASB)

Abraham

Those listening to Jesus that day would have had great respect for Abraham. A significant part of Scripture is devoted to telling of his life. So we will spend a few lines on the character, action and reward of Abraham.

Character

What sort of a fellow was this Abraham? First, he was a pious man[92]. He is frequently presented to us as offering various sacrifices to God. When God told him to pack up and move, he packed up and moved. Anyone in his time would certainly have noticed it.

That connects very well with the fact that he is also a faithful man[93]. What he says he will do, he does. This is a man of upright integrity.

Actions

We have a wealth of material on Abraham; here are four of his acts which show his pious, faithful character:

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[92] Genesis 12:7-8, for example.
[93] Hebrews 11:8-10

- He is a defender of the righteous. When God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, [94] he intervened. It is an act of boldness. When the Almighty intends to destroy a city, most of us would check our insurance coverage before heading out in our RV to a safe distance. Abraham brings before God the possibility of destroying the righteous with the wicked. In fact, God does send an angel to the only righteous man in town (Lot). But see that the defense of the righteous requires a relationship with God which is very close. It also requires a certain boldness.
- He is unselfish. Recall the time that his flocks and herds grew so large that he and Lot had to part company.[95] It's pretty clear that one choice will give you a well watered valley, the other a climate much drier. The choice might have caused friction and fighting; Abraham settles it by telling Lot he may pick which direction he'd like; Abraham will take the second choice.
- Abraham practiced hospitality.[96] Indeed, he practiced it to angels without knowing that fact. In those times travel meant danger; only the homes of the hospitable were safe. Despite whatever risk there might have been from such hospitality, Abraham was gracious about it. It is a great virtue for one reason: the traveler is rarely able to pay you back.
- Finally, Abraham gave us the greatest display of faith in the Old Testament. God ordered him to sacrifice his own son – his only son – on a fiery altar. His faith was so strong that his son, Isaac, submitted to being bound and placed on the altar.[97] It is a grand picture of the Crucifixion, where God sacrificed his only begotten son.

Reward

It sometimes comes as a surprise to people in our time that God actually rewards righteousness – that is, in the here and now. A gold-plated harp for eternity seems plausible, but in this world it's dog eat dog. But see what God did for this man of faith:

- He gave him all the material blessings he could handle.[98] We sometimes picture God as preferring us to be ascetic and poor. Actually, those who live the life of ordinary holiness are usually blessed this way. Some see it as divine providence; others see it as the natural result of hard work. It's likely enough both.
- Abraham is also raised to the highest honor in the Old Testament: he is called the friend of God. This is one reason we are called to pray for those in authority over us; we're the friends of God.[99]

The Rich Man

The rich man – we will call him by the traditional name, Dives – has character too. We may make the comparison as we go.

Character

It's easy to say that Dives must have been a rotten character, given what happened to him in the end. But we can some virtue in him:

- There is no sense that he is the Prodigal Son. He probably was a hard working man, at least in his younger days.

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[94] Genesis 18:23-32
[95] Genesis 13:5-12
[96] Genesis 18:1-16
[97] Genesis 22:1-19
[98] Genesis 13:2
[99] John 15:15

- His primary character flaw seems to stem from one thing: he never had enough misfortune to cause him to look at himself. He was not a man of self-examination.
- One thing is sure: he enjoyed his wealth – with the emphasis on the word "his."

Actions

A man is known by the work he does. How does Dives look in this department?

- He partied. Today, he would be known as a fraternity brother grown old; the parties were his life.
- He was likely enough hospitable – to the rich. There is no sense here of him being a miser; on the contrary, he likely used his wealth to curry favor among the rich.
- But one thing we do know for certain: he was ostentatious. Today he would be the guy with the solid gold chains around his neck, the big house with the Mercedes in the driveway who invites folks over for a barbeque now and then.

Reward

Simply put, Dives went to hell. The word used here is the Greek Hades, which is usually translated as "the grave." There is another word used to denote hell. So this man is not in the worst possible place – yet. So he's not in hell; but he's sure not in heaven.

The Dialogue

It is interesting that Lazarus says nothing in this story. The conversation is between Dives and Abraham. So let's walk through the conversation and see what results.

Dives

Dives doesn't get a speaking part until he reaches Hades. What he does there is rather pitiable:

- Note first that Dives can see Lazarus. He ignored him at his own gate; now he sees. It is a form of justice.
- Now it is Dives who begs (and the last shall be first). He indeed does not have the courage to beg Lazarus directly; he goes to Abraham. With him, he begs for mercy.
- But note one thing: it's still "me first." First fix my predicament. When that fails, send to my brothers.

Abraham

Abraham, it seems, has no desire to assist Dives. Indeed, he makes three cogent points which are still relevant today:

- First, this punishment is righteous. God sends no one to hell; they're all volunteers.
- Second, this punishment is eternal. There is no possibility of rescue.
- Finally, he tells us that the witness of the Law and the Prophets is sufficient to move men to be righteous.

That last is most important. How often have you heard. "If I saw even one miracle, I would…" Here Abraham tells us: you have the evidence you need. Now what are you going to do with it?

One from the grave

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. Our world today would make Dives right at home. Money still counts in this world. The world will urge you to "be reasonable" about this religion thing.

After all, the only evidence we have says it only happened once. Since it isn't happening now, in my lifetime, that probably means it's mythical. So I don't have to worry about it. It's much better to be 'an atheist who understands and pursues reason instead of supernatural non-entities' (as one critic of our web site expressed it).

The truth is much simpler. You have the recorded witness of God's actions among men

Which brings us to the point of self-examination – that which Dives never did, apparently.

- Do you allow God to mold you by giving you misfortune? Does his word mold you in handling that misfortune?
- Are you "living richly" or living eternally?
- What do you do for the Lazarus you can see?

Millstones - Luke 17:1-10

The reader will pardon the teacher, I hope, in this. There is a monumental foolishness that must be disposed of; I propose to dispose of it by the words of our Lord himself. If we tread lightly on philosophical grounds, please understand that this is the teacher's lack, not your own. It really is that simple.

He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble. "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you. "Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? "But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and *properly* clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'? "He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done *only* that which we ought to have done.'"
(Luk 17:1-10 NASB)

God and evil

We must first make a distinction between "that which causes suffering" and evil. The matter may, I hope, be resolved by returning to high school biology. Consider, for a moment, the amoeba. If this creature gets into your bloodstream and manages to reproduce, you will soon be suffering from amoebic dysentery. The result of this, I am told, is a great deal of suffering. Does this make the amoeba evil?

It certainly makes it harmful, but I submit to you that we do not maintain spiritual warfare against the amoeba. The amoeba is the amoeba; it is not capable of "right and wrong." It is a tautology, but not a barren one, to say that only a free moral agent can commit evil; and we therefore know a free moral agent by the evil he perpetrates – or doesn't.

Such evil may be of two forms. For example, let us suppose that I handed you the glass with the amoeba in it, thinking the glass to be clean. This is the sin of omission; I forgot to wash the glass. But if I had deliberately handed you a glass full of these creatures, so that I might see you suffer, then we have a sin of commission. We rightly judge both of these as sin; but only one can result in murder charges.

Did God create evil?

The stock answer from those who are sure God doesn't exist is, "Of course. God created everything." Evil is seen as the natural opponent of good, equal and opposite – something like Lucas' "dark side of the force." Other than Zoroastrianism, this concept is rejected by all the major religions of the world.

The reasoning is simple: consider light. We sometimes say that someone is "in the dark" or that "the light dawned on him." But we do not consider darkness to be the opposite of light, for it really is the absence of light. To create light is not to create darkness, but to create the possibility of darkness. The apostle John tells us that God is light; in him there is no darkness.[100]

But darkness depends upon someone at the light switch; that someone is a free moral agent.

The uses of evil

This is not to say that God does not use evil for his own purposes. Indeed, Augustine held that God would allow no evil except those out of which he could bring a greater good. How?

- Sometimes it's chastisement. You had it coming to you; he allowed it to get to you in order to get to you.
- Often, he is training you for his task – of helping others with the same kind of evil consequences.
- Perhaps most of all is this: so that you would see evil overcome, and thus see the glory of God.

Ah, the skeptic asks, then why shouldn't we be as evil as we please, since God is so astute in using it for his own cause?

God forbid

Let me rephrase that argument in modern terms, so that we might see the fraud involved in it.

- All would agree: for a policeman to catch a thief – is a good thing. It is a blessing on all of us.
- Therefore, to increase this good thing, let us establish a school to teach inept burglary to people – so we will have more, easily caught, thieves. This would increase the good things our police do.

It's stupid. But put God in for the policeman and sin in for the burglary, and you have the argument you get at cocktail parties – at least, before the second Martini.

There is a second argument for the Christian. It is simply this: you are "in Christ." Your spirit is comforted by the Holy Spirit; you, therefore, are to be holy. Is this compatible with willful sin?

More than that, we need to recognize the fact: you are a servant of whomever or whatever you serve. The man who signs my paycheck is the one I call boss; it is equally true that the one I call boss is the one who signs my paycheck.

What should we do?

Stumbling blocks are bound to happen; we live in a fallen world. What should we do about this?

First, as my wife tells me, you know they're out there – why are you so surprised when they turn up? We need to be on our guard:

- We need to guard against the normal run of sin – the flesh, the world and the devil.
- We need to guard ourselves against the grave temptation to make an alliance with the world, doing things God's way then the world's way.

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[100] 1 John 1:5

We need to be diligent – for at his return he will be looking for the good and faithful servant.

And just what did he put us in charge of?

Watch over your brother

He makes it clear that we are to watch over our Christian brothers and sisters – and be enormously patient and forgiving with them. We are to rebuke them (privately) and forgive them every time they repent.

The thought that they could do this – not must, could – struck the disciples as being absurd. Such a thing, they knew, could only come to one of great faith.

Increase our faith

Why did the disciples ask this?

- First, because such forgiveness seemed to be impossible. They could not visualize themselves doing it.
- But they knew by now that faith was key to doing the impossible. So, confronted with the impossible, they asked for faith.
- Which implies that they both had faith – and new it wasn't enough faith.

One of the great comforts of such a passage is that even those who saw Jesus in the flesh asked for the same things I ask for.

The parable of the servant

To our eyes this parable might seem strange. But think of it this way: should your company be inclined, they might give you a bonus. But only if you did things which were unexpected of one in your position. What Christ has commanded here is the expectation of normal in the Christian – not something done only by a super saint. But the passage is not without its points:

- First, and most surprising to modern ears, is that there is no way for us to put God in our debt. No matter how forgiving we are, it is still obedience to command.
- Second, it implies that we are all servants of God – which is to say that our picture of being equal with Christ is indeed false. By grace you are saved.
- Third, it tells us that the Master comes first – and then all else will fall into its correct place.

The distinction, you see, is between "as commanded" and "above and beyond." Medals are given to those who go above and beyond; campaign ribbons are given to everyone who did his duty. Forgiveness of others falls under the latter category.

That, we understand, may take great faith indeed. It seems so contrary to common sense; only those of great faith would attempt it. Indeed, it is a hard question. It's just not an optional one.

Leprosy and Glory - Luke 17:11-19

It is such a simple story. The great writers seem to have passed over it as having nothing extra to add. But all Scripture is profitable, therefore we shall see if we can profit by this:

While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; and they raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they were going, they were cleansed. Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine--where are they? "Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has made you well."

(Luk 17:11-19 NASB)

The Leper

Even in our day the word "leper" is used to describe someone (metaphorically) as an outcast from whatever group he is in. The name has earned its reputation:

- Leprosy (or more properly Hansen's disease) is a vile disease. Beginning at the forehead it produces decay in the skin and exterior. Slowly, but surely, it destroys the flesh. Along with this it numbs the body so that the decaying flesh is not felt – and there is no tingle of pain to warn the leper of danger. It is not unusual to see fingers and toes fall off in the later stages of the disease. The effect is suitable for a Halloween costume.
- As if the leper didn't have enough trouble, most people considered it a sign of God's judgment. There are several instances of this in the Old Testament. Not only did you become an exile from life in your village, everyone assumed you had earned this treatment by some particularly villainous sin.
- The leper was required to keep himself covered, especially around the mouth. One of the early symptoms was decay in the area of the lips, which cause the skin over the chin to sag and bare the gum area. He could not approach other people. He was not allowed to move from village to village; he had to stay on the outskirts of his native village. When you add to this the strictness of the inspection for healing, you can see that a leper would be one of the most miserable people in the world.

The lepers' plea

It is worth our time to examine the actions of these lepers, for they were healed. Perhaps we can see things applicable to our lives today. Such as:

- They were properly obedient to the Law they knew. They stood at the right distance to shout their plea. Obedience is still a virtue.
- They "cried out" – the sound of hope to men most hopeless. God urges us to call on His name, to cry out to him, whether leper or not.
- When Christ tells them to go, they go – in faith. Note that Christ did not heal them immediately; he simply tells them to present themselves to the priest, in accordance with the Law of Moses. They are healed on the way. We are seeing faith being the source of obedience.

Your faith has healed you

They go - but it is not the going that heals, it is the obedience of faith. The actual work of seeing the priest is not the source of healing. We are saved by faith, the grace of God.

Then the curious thing happens. The Samaritan (an outcast among even the Jewish lepers) returns, falls on his face before Jesus and gives glory to God. The Jews do not.

Have you ever wondered about passages that say, "The first shall be last, and the last first?" Here is an example. Christ is sent to the Jews; they come first, as they are the people chosen by God. So this Samaritan sees his own lowliness; but with a heart for God returns. Do you not see how this Samaritan, the last, is now first?

Jesus, the Christ

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. This is a most important journey, for all must be ready at the time of Passover. Jesus came to die for our sins; you can imagine his intensity of focus.

- He was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. It is only when Israel rejects the Holy One that the Gospel can be preached to the world.
- His mind is set on one place: Jerusalem. It is the center of Judaism, and the place at which he must die.
- With all this on his mind, he stops for these ten lepers. He gives no instruction to the disciples about this; he just does it.

Distractions

Do you see how these people presented themselves – as a distraction? He could have dismissed these people. Like this:

- Look, I'm in a hurry to get to Jerusalem. Catch up with me later.
- This is not my job. Check with the disciples in a few weeks.
- Whoops – we have a ten percent problem here. Lose the Samaritan and then we'll talk.

The amazing thing is that he took the time, rather than the excuses. The people at hand are hurting; don't put them on hold.

It brings up some questions for us:

- Do you take the time, interrupting your schedule, to deal with those who are hurting?
- Are you your brother's keeper? Do you care for the hurting around you?
- Do others need to meet your standards before you'll consider giving them some help?

But this Samaritan is not done teaching us yet.

No one to give glory, except…

The Samaritan returns alone and gives glory to God. Note that he does not thank Jesus; rather, he gives God the glory. He knows that only God could do this; thinking the man to be a prophet, the Samaritan rightly gives the glory to God.

That's the question for us. When the Lord is gracious and kind, do we give him the glory for it? Or do we say it was luck, coincidence or skill on our part?

Glory to God

You've read that phrase many times; have you ever stopped to ask "what does it mean?" Let's take a look. It comes highly commended; perhaps we might ask why.

Glory of God

Glory is to God as style is to an artist. But can we see that? How? Where?

- One place is the planet we're on – and the stars. We see the artist in the glory of his work.[101]
- It was seen when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.[102] Again, it is the divine style to "make all things new again."
- Indeed, it can be seen in mundane things, for we have Paul's word for it that all things can be done for the glory of God.[103]
- The greatest picture of God's glory is found in his earthly image, Jesus the Christ.[104]

Glory of the church

The bride of the Christ is given glory too. This glory is meant to be seen by us and by others. How?

- First, in the Scriptures.[105] The Law of Moses was given during a display of God's glory and power – but the words of Christ are even more glorious.
- We are to be filled with "joy unspeakable and full of glory."[106] We are the glory of the church, those whose lives rejoice in all things, visible to the world.
- This joy is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.[107]

The Holy Spirit is connected firmly with the glory of God. Consider:

- Our salvation comes with eternal glory.[108]
- Indeed, we are called to that glory.[109]
- In fact, even the afflictions we bear in this world for Christ will yield glory in the world to come.[110]

But there is more than this to glory.

Glory to come

The time approaches for the return of Christ. This will be the great display of the glory of God. He will not come to us as a meek baby, but in overwhelming power and glory. We shall see it; we shall be part of it.

- Our bodies, buried to decay will be raised in glory and power.[111]

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[101] Psalm 19:1
[102] John 11:40
[103] 1 Corinthians 10:31
[104] 2 Corinthians 4:6
[105] 1 Corinthians 2:7
[106] 1 Peter 1:18
[107] 2 Corinthians 3:18
[108] 2 Timothy 2:20
[109] 2 Timothy 2:14
[110] 2 Corinthians 4:17
[111] 1 Corinthians 15:43

- Indeed, Paul tells us we can add to that glory with the fruits of service to him. My students are my glory; I am glory for my teachers too.[112]
- Perhaps the greatest glory of all is this: at Christ's return, every knee will bow, every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord – *to the glory of God the Father.*[113]

When is he returning? Soon.

[112] 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20
[113] Philippians 2:11

Within You - Luke 17:20-37

If ink were blood then the most severe of battles would be over prophecy. No subject disgraces the church more than the combat over Revelation. Therefore, we will approach this passage with the reminder that "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here *it is!*' or, 'There *it is!*' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." And He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. "They will say to you, 'Look there! Look here!' Do not go away, and do not run after *them*. "For just like the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day. "But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. "And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. "It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. "It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. "On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back. "Remember Lot's wife. "Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses *his life* will preserve it. "I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. "There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left. ["Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left."] And answering they *said to Him, "Where, Lord?" And He said to them, "Where the body *is*, there also the vultures will be gathered."
(Luk 17:20-37 NASB)

The Kingdom of God

It must be noted first that this passage deals with two things often interchanged: the kingdom of God and the Second Coming. We shall teach on the Second Coming a little later; first , let us deal with the kingdom of God.

No signs visible

Christ here tells us that there will be no visible signs of the coming of the kingdom of God. "Not with swords loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drum" is indeed the case. Over and again Christ portrays the kingdom to be a gradual, growing thing – it starts out small but in the end is very large.

More to the point today, Christ tells us that it will be without "signs." In other words, the kingdom does not arrive by miracles, but by the ordinary process of growth.

In your midst

The text of the Scripture here can have two meanings:

- It may be translated "within you." This is the way the King James had it, and therefore the interpretation was that the kingdom of God was something that happened internally, by your thought and will.
- It can also be translated "in your midst," meaning that the kingdom of God is among the people, living in society, but not being of society.
- Each view has its adherents; perhaps Christ meant both. The word in question is *entos*, from which we get our word "enteric", meaning something related to our intestines.

Asking the wrong question

The point is simple: to ask "where" or "when" the kingdom of God will arrive is asking a nonsense question. The right questions are "who" (Jesus Christ) and "how" (gradually, almost unnoticed). The end of the church as we know it will be at the Second Coming of our Lord.

The Day of the Lord

Known variously as the day of the Lord, the day of Wrath, the day of the Son of Man (and not all agree that those are all the same), the day is different from the kingdom of God. Regrettably, the two are often confused. One reason for this confusion is that the day of the Lord is the point at which the kingdom of God (his people) are transformed into eternity.

In the deserts of California there lives a cactus known as the century plant. It rarely blooms or flowers, but when conditions are just right it shoots up a huge center stalk, flowers blooming. If you were to encounter one not knowing this, you would not imagine such a thing. The name comes from the rarity of the blossom (i. e. it blooms once in a century). The church is like that; when the conditions are right, the church will bloom in all its resurrected glory. But when are conditions just right?

First comes…

Christ gives us very little concerning the timing of his return – but a great deal of instruction on what must be done in the meanwhile. Here is the little we do know:

- As this was taught before the Crucifixion, Christ rightly tells them that he must suffer first.
- More as a warning than as an indicator, he tells us that false prophets and false Christs, with convincing miraculous power, will arise. (This should settle the hash of Joseph Smith, Mohammed and any number of lesser lights).
- One very tangible sign is this: the Gospel must be preached to the entire world ("all nations") before he returns.[114]
- Finally, the sinister figure known as "the man of lawlessness" (and the apostasy he heads) must come.[115] There is much speculation on this; in general, Protestants think he is either the papacy (collectively) or the last pope.

Signs of the times

Christ is equally general concerning the signs of the times:

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[114] Matthew 24:14
[115] 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

- He tells us that there will be wars and rumors of wars, disasters aplenty – and these are just the beginning. This seems to be of little assistance to those trying to determine the time – but of great help to those who have already figured it out. War and disaster we have in plenty; they can easily be made to fit whatever theory you have.
- One sign which distinguishes us from the church of the Middle Ages: we have those who are certain the Lord's return is simply mythical. The mockers and scoffers are with us in force. To be a true Christian in our day is to be laughed at.
- Another sign is this: things will be happening as they normally do. This is not of much help in determining the time, but it does point out that when things are going well, we should still be prepared for the coming of our Lord.

The Return

Having established how little we have in the way of signs for "when" (and I think that was Christ's intention) we may now proceed to "how." Christ's main point here is that we will not be able to miss it. If you have to be told where, that's not the one you're looking for.

Openings

We are told little about the opening of the return, but what little we do know is impressive enough.

- It will be seen all over the earth. There will be no mistake about it.
- There will be great signs in the visible heavens. Stars falling, moon failing to light, darkened sun are mentioned. Some[116] interpret this as events in the political sphere (remember how Joseph told his brothers that their stars bowed down to his?); the plain sense of the Scripture, however, seems against this.
- The purpose of his coming is to give everyone what they deserve – good or bad. It is a time of judgment.

Much difficulty exists in going beyond this, as the various theories of interpretation vary significantly in more details. One issue will serve as an example: The points cited seem to imply one resurrection of the dead. Those who follow Hal Lindsey's work will know that he posits six resurrections (one of those being the resurrection of Christ).

Christ's enemies

It is sometimes difficult for Christians to comprehend, but the gentle Jesus they have been taught to know is also the Lord of Judgment. So, briefly, here's what we know will happen to those who are Christ's enemies:

- They will be weeded out of the throng containing the church. Those who were worshippers in name only – the goats[117] - will be separated from those who did God's will on earth. Those who are ashamed to call themselves Christians will find Christ ashamed of them.
- These will receive the treatment of God's wrath – eternally. It is pictured in Revelation as a lake of fire.

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[116] Generally speaking, these are adherents to the Post-Millennial interpretation.
[117] Matthew 25:31ff

- They will suffer from "eternal destruction"[118] – the eternity without Christ. This is the popular way of phrasing things today: a "Christless eternity." Somehow, that doesn't seem nearly as bad as hell.

Beyond these, we are into the various theories again. But I submit that these are quite sufficient to make the point.

For His children

Those whom Christ has redeemed have a much different fate:

- He said he was going "to prepare a place" for us. This, one suspects, is the same as the New Heaven and New Earth seen by the Apostle John. All of our pictures of this are symbolic; what those symbols tell us is that this will indeed be a glorious change.
- The Christian redeemed will have a new body[119] – raised from the dead or meeting him in the air.
- Finally, we will be with him for all of eternity.

What to do

Having said all this, and leaving a great deal not said, just what should we do about it?

- Permit me to begin with what we should *not* do:
- We should not pass judgment on each other.[120]
- We should not use revelation to replace righteousness. If you have all knowledge of his coming, and have not love, what good is it?
- When he comes – don't look back.

What should we do?

- Over and again he tells us – be on the alert! Be ready!
- Ready – how? By doing what he commanded us to do. From the ordinary charity of the Christian life to the Lord's Supper, we must not neglect that which he has commanded.

It sounds simple; it is. It sounds unbelievable too. But then again, who would have believed in the resurrection before Christ showed it to us?

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[118] 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10
[119] Philippians 3:20-21
[120] 1 Corinthians 4:5

Man, Woman and Child - Luke 18:1-17

On his way to his last visit in Jerusalem, Christ takes the time to teach his disciples about the kingdom of God. Using stories and matters at hand, he imparts to them the simple yet profound character of the kingdom.

The Unjust Judge

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. "There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' "For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge *said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luk 18:1-8 NASB)

Do not lose heart

Christ's understanding of our prayer life is shown here. To tell a Jew of this time that he ought to pray would be redundant; to tell him that he ought to pray constantly would have been disbelieved (rightly so.) Instead, he identifies the problem most of us have with persistence in prayer: we give up much too soon. Why?

- Some of us think ourselves too much a sinner to pray effectively. That we are all sinners is clear; Christ inquires only of your direction, not the pig wallow you came from.
- Others – raised on evangelists who tell you to repeat this prayer, word for word – feel they don't have the right words. Prayer is not magic. If you still think you need the right words, read the Psalms. But pray.
- For most of us it's simply this: God never gives me what I ask for. This is usually a sign that God will give you what you need; it's obvious you don't know what's good for you. There is a reason we don't give submachine guns to small children.
- Sometimes we just give up too soon. Wait upon the Lord, as the Scriptures say.

The dishonest judge

That's the usual title; it would be more fittingly called The Persistent Widow. I call your attention to her characteristics:

- She's a widow – which in that time meant "poverty stricken." This is not someone whom God has favored in matters monetary. It is safe to conclude that there is nothing extraordinary about her relationship to God.
- Note, please, her simplicity. She does not approach with a smorgasbord of demands, as we sometimes do. Nor does her cause seem particularly important in the larger scheme of things; no grandeur here. The cause was important only to her. This doesn't sound so noble, does it?
- Of course, we note her persistence.

Christ's comparison is not that we must nag God over and over again; it's that our persistence will be rewarded both quickly and richly.

However….

We often feel the Almighty to be too slow with us. Patience is a virtue; God's patience with the sinners of this world is an excellent example. Remember that while he is delaying what you want he may be the salvation they need. Do you not see what this is? The question is not so much of "how persistent" we need to be; it is more a question of whether or not we trust him – or lose heart along the way. There is a connection between faith and prayer; the kingdom of God is built by the prayers of the faithful.

Humility

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."
(Luk 18:9-14 NASB)

An exceeding righteousness

Let us begin by stating the obvious: the Pharisee is factually correct. He is more righteous than the other guy.

- The Law required fasting only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. The Pharisees fasted every Monday and Thursday.
- The Law required a tithe of most major agricultural things; he exceeds this by tithing even the herbs from his garden.

The problem is not his practice but his attitude.

- He despises the tax collector; it is an attitude of hatred.
- He passes judgment on the tax collector (how we are taught not to do that).
- He assumes that God agrees with him.

But note one thing: what was it the Pharisee wanted of God? The only thing mentioned here is for God to agree with his assessment of himself and the tax collector. Even that is not certain; whatever his request was, it's missing now. He did not go to the Temple to seek the Almighty in prayer; he went to tell the Almighty how lucky he was to have a servant like me.

The tax collector

The tax collector at least had a clear idea of why he was there.

- He had a clear idea of *who he was*. He was a tax collector, a toad who worked for the invading Romans. As we can see from the Pharisee's pronouncement, that makes him worse that swindlers, the unjust or even adulterers.
- He had a clear idea of *who he wasn't.* He knew he wasn't righteous; he knew he wasn't worthy. To the extent that he didn't even go up near the temple; he's at the back of the church in the hope that the preacher won't notice him.

- He had a clear idea of *what he wanted.* He wanted mercy; mercy from the God whose mercies are new every morning. And he got it.

The kingdom of God comes in prayer; also in humility.

Suffer the little children

And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they *began* rebuking them. But Jesus called for them, saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all.*"
(Luk 18:15-17 NASB)

It is useful here to ask, just what characteristics of a young child are commendable to the Christian? Here are a few:

Obedience

Do remember that Christ spoke in a culture in which children were last and least. It was also a society in which the Prodigal Son was a minority. Of obedience in children we may observe:

- It is commanded, expected and fruitful *even though you don't know "why."* Children are taught to do as they are told; the explanations sometimes come years later.
- Children know that obedience pleases both God and their parents. Such pleasure leads to good; disobedience to hard times.
- It is a good habit for children, indeed for their own good. There is a reason we don't let them play soccer on the freeway.

Open to be taught

Children are naturally curious. They want to know things. For the childlike faith we should take the same attitude. We should want to know.

We should not desire just any answer. Like our children, we want to know the right answer. Good enough, isn't

Indeed, as any parent can tell you, "Why?" is the most frequent question. To grow in understanding is to grow as a Christian.

In over their heads

Small children are simply not capable of understanding or handling their world. They are accustomed to the idea that they would not understand.

- It's common to them to be "out of the loop." They know that they don't know everything.
- When they do know, it's common that they don't understand.
- Indeed, once they master one level of comprehension, they find that the onion of knowledge indeed has many layers.

It is this willingness to live without knowing everything, yet curious about all things, that marks the Christian who has learned to "wait upon the Lord."

Trust

Little children have that innocent trust which renders them both charming and helpless.

- They know that their parents love them.
- They know that their parents are strong.
- They understand that the power to correct them is also the power to save them.

Put God in those three bullets and see if that doesn't mean trust.

Loyalty

Little children have this too: they are loyal to their parents and their family.

Now, look back on those things: obedience, the ability to be taught, comfortable even though they're in over their heads, trusting and loyal – do these not describe the child of God?

Principles on the Road - Luke 18:18-43

It often seems that, as you read through the Gospel, that some of these incidents "just happened." In this lesson we see some of these encounters. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and the Crucifixion; we are privileged to walk with him a little while along the road.

In these vignettes we see certain principles. Among these are:

- *Perfection.* This is not the same thing as sinlessness; rather, it means something which is perfectly suited for a particular task. For example, a blacksmith might have the "perfect" piece of metal to hammer into an axe. It is perfect – but needs to hammered to be useful.
- *Sacrifice.* It is always the best, always the thing you cherish most, given with no strings attached.
- *Persistence.* No matter what the crowd says, know what you want and pray persistently.

The pursuit of perfection

A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" And he said, "All these things I have kept from *my* youth." When Jesus heard *this,* He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God." Peter said, "Behold, we have left our own *homes* and followed You." And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."
(Luk 18:18-30 NASB)

(A more conventional look at this passage is found in the Life of Christ study.)

I submit to you the concept that the rich young ruler is a man pursuing perfection – and finding it elusive indeed.

- He knows, somehow, that he has missed something. He has come to the new rabbi to answer for this hunger.
- He correctly phrases his question in terms of obtaining eternal life – something the Old Testament just hints at.
- He has been a man of "ordinary holiness" – as Jesus confirms here.

He is righteous; he is not perfect. It seems he deals well with people (the list of the commandments tells us that) but his relationship to God is not so good. Something is wrong.

Jesus gives him the answer:

- First, if you want ultimate, eternal answers you must seek them from the Ultimate Authority. Nothing else will work. When you seek forgiveness, the world's authorities will sell you forgetfulness. Go to God for eternal solutions.

- In this instance, the man's money is in the way. So Christ tells him to chuck the money away to the poor and follow him. The Jews held that riches were a sign of divine favor (which may be true); even a good thing may be thrown out if it's preventing the ultimate thing. The good is always the enemy of the best.
- Then – it is too simple – follow Christ. It is simple; it is not glamorous; it may involve things utterly mundane. But if Christ calls you to mop floors in his name, get a bucket.

The disciples are amazed at this. Their perspective is that this fellow was much closer to God than they were. Look at how God had favored him! In his reply Jesus points out the perils of money. Taken from life, here are some:

- You may worry *over* money – how am I to get more, how should I invest what I have, how much is enough.
- Or you may let it give you a sense of false security.
- Sometimes the problem is that you are spending your money in the same way "the crowd" is. Now you are ruled by your money and your mob.
- Still true: you cannot serve two masters.

This sounds so radical to their ears – Karl Marx had yet to tell them that the rich are always their enemies – that Christ must assure them of one point: with man, it's impossible for a rich man to be saved. But with God, all things are possible. Sometimes it just isn't easy.

Sacrifice

Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. "For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." But the disciples understood none of these things, and *the meaning of* this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.
(Luk 18:31-34 NASB)

The disciples didn't get this. Later, after the Resurrection, they remembered and understood.

Christ is about to become our sacrifice for sins; our Passover lamb. We seldom hear about sacrificing for God (or to God) these days; the word seems so harsh. But let us see if we can discover why Christ bothered to teach them about his coming sacrifice. Here are some of the principles that we should be familiar with:

- A sacrifice to God must be the best you have. In the Old Testament, the sacrifice for sin had to be "unblemished." We understand the differences, at least. The check you write for your tithe hurts more than the bag of old clothes given to the Salvation Army. One is a sacrifice; the other a fortunate convenience. Christ, our Passover lamb, was without sin. He is the best mankind has.
- A sacrifice to God comes from the things you cherish most. In the Old Testament, you had to redeem your first born son – because he was dedicated to God. The other children did not need this. This is not always in money. Many of us cherish our time ("I am too busy to work at the church"), our pleasures ("Back next week, I have a golf game this Sunday"), and even our privacy (the preacher might hit upon your secret sin by "accident.") Is there anything you cherish more than your life? Christ gave that as a sacrifice for us.

- A true sacrifice comes with no strings attached. This means that you don't get tangled up in the strings. Give, and go on. Some of us make our sacrifices like a yo-yo; always ready to be yanked back. God takes no yo-yo's.

Persistence

As Jesus was approaching Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road begging. Now hearing a crowd going by, he *began* to inquire what this was. They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he called out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him; and when he came near, He questioned him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And he said, "Lord, *I want* to regain my sight!" And Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and *began* following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.
(Luk 18:35-43 NASB)

Whenever someone complains that their prayers are not being heard, we are quick to point out that this is due to some hidden sin in their life (Job went through 40 chapters of that). As most of us have skeletons in our closets, we go away satisfied with the answer – but with no solution.

Persistence. That we should see that this is the answer in our time is very difficult, for the solutions we see on TV rarely last more than an hour. Let us see what principles might be harvested from this incident:

- *Ignore the crowd*. They change their minds with any change of wind. Have you ever seen kindergarten kids play soccer? No matter how carefully coached to stay in position, the game quickly deteriorates into "killer bee" soccer – everyone swarms the ball. Now you know the difference between a crowd and a team. Listen to your teammates; ignore the crowd.
- *Know what you want*. "Oh Lord, here is my laundry list. Thank you. Amen." Separate out the trivial from the important. Separate out the urgent from that which is not – which implies you know importance and urgency (from God's point of view).
- *Pray with persistence*. Prayer is an act of spiritual daring. That, sometimes, is why we aren't persistent. We got away with talking to God once; did you want to push your luck? Yes, please push your "luck." God answers those who pray in faith.

One last thought: prayer needs a good beginning and a good ending. A good beginning is to acknowledge who you are and who Christ is. Let him know that you do fear Him – and with good reason.

Then, when all is over, do not fail to give the glory to God. Some of us actually like to brag (modestly, of course) about how good we are at prayer. The ones who really are good at prayer, those whose prayers are answered consistently, are the ones who acknowledge God as the one who did the work. It's amazing what you can get if you don't try to take credit.

Last Stop on the Road - Luke 19:1-27

Children's Choir director. Fear enough for any man; the attempt to squeeze music out of a collection of three year olds, knowing full well that not one can carry a tune – and all their parents are listening.

A favorite of such directors is the song, "Zaccheus was a wee little man." The song comes with a series of motions for the little darlings, most of whom will be looking at the kid next to them and copying his movements. The whole thing usually produces the laughter that comes when cute kids try.

There is, however, no humor in the man they are singing about. Zaccheus was not only a "wee little man" – he was a social outcast.

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way. When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. When they saw it, they all *began* to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."
(Luk 19:1-10 NASB)

Benedict Arnold

To understand the passage, we must begin with the generally low esteem given to tax collectors of any time. Taxpayers of any time are prone to revolt (remember Proposition 13?), so means must be devised to prevent that. The Romans had an elegant system: they recruited some Jews to tax all the rest of them. They also made it very lucrative to do so – especially when the tax law is complex (do you do your own?) and cheating the taxpayer an easy thing to do. The system was designed to produce traitors and toads, and it was quite good at it. The closest I have seen to it in modern life is the system of "trusty" and racial enmity found in our prisons.

Do outcasts have dignity?

If an outcast develops dignity, he soon becomes a laughingstock. We raise our children to be cool, with it and (hopefully) on their way to being adults. Adulthood enforces the same message: you're either in the right crowd – or an outcast. What's it like to be an outcast?

- First, such people are considered worthless. Suppose you are planning an activity, say, a church picnic. The questions of menu and location come quickly; it is dangerous to pick these things by yourself. Whose opinion do you value? It's a social occasion; you listen to social people. The outcast is lucky to hear about the event.
- Second, the outcast is easy to hate. Hatred plays a major role in things political (see how the press treats George Bush). If someone is worthless, that same someone is easy to despise. (The politically correct have mastered this weapon.)

- For the most part, such people are lone and lonely. It makes them miserable – which is what most of us think they should be.

Do you think this an unreasonable thought? Let me test your understanding with a few thoughts:

- Have you seen what the teenage girls are wearing to church these days? The "fashion" of the moment is to look like a prostitute. (A seventh grade girl wearing fishnet hose can be a fright). Dressing modestly makes you an outcast.
- But surely that wouldn't affect the church, would it? Look on our website; one of the great things listed about our New Song worship is that "casual attire is emphasized." Emphasized?

Perhaps we might take a clue from the younger generation and ask, What Would Jesus Do? We might start here with the grace Jesus shows to an outcast.

On Repentance

Zaccheus, to his credit, understands money – and repentance. Money has been running his life; it's what he's good at. So when he repents, he does so in gold:

- Repentance means restoring. Zaccheus exceeds the requirements of the Law of Moses for fraud.
- Repentance means doing the good you can. Money he had in abundance; as the poor of Jericho will now see.
- Repentance means taking on a new Lord. Zaccheus exchanged a poor master (money) for The Master.

Examine the reaction of Jesus. There is no formula; no baptism, no words to be repeated. Why? Because Jesus knows the truth in his heart; and when man repents sincerely, God will forgive. Right now. Today, salvation has come to this house.

Repentance certainly has its rewards, to be sure. The poor of Jericho no doubt had occasion to bless the name of Zaccheus. Those he defrauded might be taken aback by the change – but they'll take the money. There's even a blessing to us today, for Christ must speak of the coming kingdom of God – and what better example to use in front of Zaccheus than one that involves money:

"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." While they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. So He said, "A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and *then* return. "And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, 'Do business *with this* until I come *back*.' "But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' "When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done. "The first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.' "And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.' "The second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' "And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.' "Another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.' "He *said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow? 'Then why did you not put my money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with

interest?' "Then he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' "And they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas *already*.' "I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. "But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence."
(Luk 19:10-27 NASB)

We must understand this parable in the light of the moment Christ uses it. Many of those around Jesus think that the Son of David is ready to restore David's throne. It is a political and military solution, but that's what they expected from the Prince of Peace. Others around him saw things as much more difficult. They correctly estimated the reaction of the religious authorities. Zaccheus repented; the religious authorities saw no reason for their own repentance. But the repentance of Zaccheus could be seen as the opening move of a political scheme to unite the twelve tribes again and begin the revolution.

To point his followers to the truth, Jesus tells them a parable – one which would be very familiar to his hearers. Here's why:

The "man" in the parable is doing what Herod the Great did. When the Romans conquered a territory, it was their custom to install puppet royalty. The royalty got a cut of the take; Rome needed far fewer troops to enforce their wishes. Herod went to Rome to be crowned king. This didn't sit well with the Jews – especially since Herod was not even native Jewish. Upon his return, he set in motion a series of murders and deaths which consolidated his grip on the throne. He had no problem with this. Of course, this is the man who ordered the slaughter of the infants at the time of Jesus' birth. (The Herod reigning at this time was the grandson of that Herod.)

We're not too familiar with the royalty of that day, but the parable has real meaning for us:

- For the "good and faithful," the return of Christ will be a time of reward – which will be all out of proportion to our efforts. Faithful in little, faithful in much.
- For those who did not work, there will be no reward. Paul describes such people as being like those who escaped a house fire – and lost everything but the clothes on their backs.
- But for those who are Christ's enemies, there will be nothing but death, destruction and hell.

It is not popular to preach and teach this. Its sole virtue is that it's true. May it give the reader reason to reflect upon his or her own actions.

Triumphal Entry - Luke 19:29-48

(Frequent readers will know that a more conventional treatment of this topic can be found in the *Life of Christ, Mark* and *John* series. All are titled the same way. My apologies to those who came looking for the obvious; there's a lot in this passage.)

We must begin this morning with some common misconceptions about prophecy. Most Christians are not scholars of the Scripture; even those who are often shy away from prophecy. These are some of the thoughts you would encounter if you asked the typical Christian about prophecy:

- Prophecy is far too obscure to understand. This usually happens to anyone following a study of the book of Revelation. Many teachers will attempt the first three chapters – and hide the rest. This is not God's intention, I think – that's why we have the book of Daniel. God's prophecies are meant to be understood – but they are not meant to be a daily guide to the stock market. God's prophecies are for God's purposes.
- Prophecy seems to lack cohesion or coherency. Bits and dabs of prophecy are stuck here and there throughout the Bible. How's a man to know which is which? This is largely due to our ignorance of the Old Testament. God often taught his prophets in prophetic ways. It's not uncommon for God to issue a prophecy which has short term (in the prophet's lifetime) and long term elements. It is often expressed in poetic language. More to the point, its fulfillment is not explicit – until it happens.
- Prophecy seems something which would interest only the preacher or teacher – or the fanatic. This is not strange, nor is it incorrect. The scholars of the Scripture are to share their learning with others. Teacher and preacher are gifts from the Holy Spirit. It is their task to make sure that the Scripture as taught is indeed profitable.[121]

Prophecy Fulfilled

Prophecy often seems to be something which would not touch the common man. We see the fulfillment of prophecy to be in the hands of the world's great men, not the average guy. Listen to this dialog from Tolkien's *The Hobbit*:

"Then the prophecies of the old songs have turned out to be true, after a fashion!" said Bilbo.

"Of course!" said Gandalf. "And why should not they prove true? Surely you don't disbelieve the prophecies because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? ..."

It expresses the case rather well. Prophecy must be fulfilled, and therefore it must be fulfilled by somebody. And sometimes that somebody is a nobody in the world's eye.

God establishes the time for prophecy. He often works in providence rather than in miracle. We shall see that in today's Scripture:

When He approached Bethphage and Bethany, near the mount that is called Olivet, He sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of *you;* there, as you enter, you will find a colt tied on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it *here.* "If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say, 'The Lord has need of it.'" So those who were sent went away and found it just as He had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why

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[121] 2 Timothy 3:16

are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord has need of it." They brought it to Jesus, and they threw their coats on the colt and put Jesus *on it.* As He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, shouting: "BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!" When He approached *Jerusalem,* He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. "For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling, saying to them, "It is written, 'AND MY HOUSE SHALL BE A HOUSE OF PRAYER,' but you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN." And He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him, and they could not find anything that they might do, for all the people were hanging on to every word He said.
(Luk 19:29-48 NASB)

The colt

I know of no better example of prophetic fulfillment by the nobodies of this world than Jesus' colt. It appears to be entirely of human work – in God's time.

- First, the colt doesn't just magically appear, nor does someone appear suddenly with it. Two of his disciples are sent to get it.
- Jesus gives them the password for this. Do you not see that this implies some prior arrangement? Someone must have gone to the owners and arranged this. (Though many scholars dispute this, thinking that all prophecy must have a mystic quality to it.)
- They meet the expected owners, retrieve the colt and bring it back. It is altogether worldly.

But it is also altogether fulfilling the prophecy concerning it.[122] It is the first of many prophecies to be fulfilled on this date.

Symbolism

We have, in our society, lost this kind of thinking. When television can give you car crashes by the dozen, it's hard to remember that those car crashes were just a voice during the days of radio – and words before that. Here is the meaning of the Triumphal Entry – a meaning that the Pharisees, at least, understood perfectly.

- The fact that he rode a foal which had not been used for any other purpose before makes it fit for sacrifice for sins.[123]
- The foal of a donkey is the sign of a king entering in peace; a horse is the symbol for war.
- The crowd spreads their cloaks on the road, an honor given to kings.[124]

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[122] Zechariah 9:9
[123] Numbers 19:1-9
[124] 2 Kings 9:13

- More to the point, the crowd is singing the "Conqueror's Psalm." This was associated with the last successful rebellion of the Jews, that of Judas Maccabeus.
- And – of great significance – he comes in through the East Gate. Ezekiel tells us that this is the gate through which the glory of God will enter – and it will never be used again.[125]

Prophecies Made

It is a day of prophecy to which Christ adds his own warning. He makes four points:

- First, that enemies will surround the city and build up an embankment against it. This was fulfilled in the sack of Jerusalem in AD 70. The embankment was the standard method of taking a fortified city. The Romans took the city. They sacrificed a pig on the altar of the Temple, which (by some) was fulfillment of the "abomination of desolation" prophecy of Jesus.[126]
- Next, that these conquerors would crush the Jews and their children to the ground. Recall that, prophetically, "ground" or "earth" is a symbol of the mass of humanity at large. The Jews were going to be crushed down until they are simply like the rest of us. They indeed were dispersed over the world, suffering persecution.
- They would not leave one stone on another. The prophetic use of stones is usually to indicate those who are "stones in the Temple."[127] The Jews would have no place to govern for many long years, until 1947. (Much is made of this in prophetic speculation).
- Why? They did not receive the offer of Christ as King. Instead, they called out that "his blood be upon us and our children."[128] This plea has certainly been accorded to them.

(I should point out that, whatever the Jews of the first century did, the Jews of our time didn't. The Scripture has too often been used as a warrant to rob and persecute them.)

Christ then takes the next step: he draws a line.

Righteous Anger

It is fruitful to note that Christ's anger is reserved exclusively for the hypocrites. As he said, blasphemy against the Son of Man will be forgiven; blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not. And what is this unpardonable sin? It is to say that the Spirit is wrong; you have no guilt. Evidently they were well practiced at this, for they unblushingly turned the Temple into a market place.

The house of God is to be a house of prayer.[129] This is not the first time this has happened; if you look up the "den of thieves" quotation,[130] you will see that it comes from an earlier, fulfilled prophecy concerning the idolatry of Israel. Christ is making the situation to be seen in black and white. The crowd wants gray; the Pharisees want it white and black.

There is a lesson for us in that. In the house of God there can be no gray; His house, His color scheme. Many today have abandoned the idea that there can be something which is objectively true.

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[125] Ezekiel 43:4
[126] Matthew 24:15
[127] See 1 Peter 2:4-5
[128] Matthew 27:25
[129] Isaiah 56:7
[130] Jeremiah 7:11

But I ask you: how did one man, Jesus of Nazareth, drive all those merchants out? I submit that they knew the truth as well; it just wasn't convenient or profitable to obey it.

By What Authority? - Luke 20:1-26

The question of authority is one which transcends the technology of any given time. The authority of the Christ is shown here – by which he puts governments in their place.

Concept of Authority

On one of the days while He was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted *Him,* and they spoke, saying to Him, "Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?" Jesus answered and said to them, "I will also ask you a question, and you tell Me: "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?" They reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why did you not believe him?' "But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet." So they answered that they did not know where *it came* from. And Jesus said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things."
(Luk 20:1-8 NASB)

While this shows the deep understanding that Christ has concerning our human nature, it also shows us one salient fact: people seek authority, either to do things for them, or to do things in them. The authority of the Roman (or Jewish) government is different from the authority of John the Baptist which is different from the authority of Christ.

The moral aspect of authority

Authority, if it is to succeed in its ends, needs power. It is impossible for an amoral power to stay in authority very long – because the people needed to sustain that power will not do so if they are convinced that the authority has no moral right to rule. In Nazi Germany the Fuehrer was obeyed willingly; the people saw him as the one who would save Germany from disgrace. In occupied France, authority grew only out of the barrel of a gun.

Often, such moral authority grows in power as people become convinced of its righteousness. Martin Luther King Sr. was a fine preacher in Atlanta; his son took his dream and turned it into reality by the force of moral authority. Force was often opposed to his dream, but in the end its moral righteousness prevailed. A parallel in the Bible would be found in many of the Old Testament prophets – except Jonah.

Expert authority

Some people exercise authority by virtue of their knowledge. We allow our doctors to prescribe that which would be dangerous in ignorant hands. You take the tax preparer's word for any number of government regulations. Indeed, even a prophet fits in this category – for he had access to visions of what would be. Knowledge gives power – and authority.

Authority by position

When you see those flashing red lights in your rear view mirror, you pull over. The authority of the policeman comes from the position he has, not his own, personal authority. Those who are students of history know that kings were supposed to be born to such authority. Many times war broke out over which branch of the family inherited the divine right to be king.

Christ

Do you not see that Christ has all three types of authority?

- It is a moral righteousness intrinsic to the author of righteousness, the only one fit to be the Lamb of God.
- It is an expert righteousness, too. We ask the prophet or the stock broker to tell us the future; Christ holds the future.
- It is a righteousness of position. Heir to the throne of David, seated on the throne of God, there is no higher position in mankind.

All authority is his.[131] As we shall see, there are consequences for those who reject that authority.

Fate of Rejection

And He began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey for a long time. "At the *harvest* time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, so that they would give him *some* of the produce of the vineyard; but the vine-growers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. "And he proceeded to send another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. "And he proceeded to send a third; and this one also they wounded and cast out. "The owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' "But when the vine-growers saw him, they reasoned with one another, saying, 'This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance will be ours.' "So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them? "He will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others." When they heard it, they said, "May it never be!" But Jesus looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*'? "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them.
(Luk 20:9-19 NASB)

The Stumbling Stone

The point of the parable was immediately obvious to the people as well as the Pharisees. But let us make it clear to modern eyes:

- The stone is Christ. Those who stumble over it – those with the broken and contrite heart – are indeed broken, as well we know. Such are acceptable to the King of Kings.
- Those who refuse – and we shall see that this means the Jews – find that the stone (Christ) falls on them, and scatters them.
- About forty years later, this is exactly what happens to the Jews. The Gospel is spreading amidst the Gentiles; God shatters the Jewish nation and sends them into dispersion and exile, not to be returned until 1947.

Indeed, we have stumbled upon (pun intended) a great element of prophecy. A brief review is in order:

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[131] Matthew 28:18

- The stone is pictured in Daniel[132] as the smiting stone which will shatter the fourth empire (the Roman Empire). The stone is shown to be a picture of Christ and his church.
- It is shown in Isaiah[133] to be the stone of stumbling in a clearly Messianic passage.
- Later in Isaiah[134] the stone is the chief cornerstone.

It's laid out in prophecy; let us see the fulfillment.

Fate of the Jews

It is a simple fact: the Jews, so solidly part of the Roman Empire, are surrounded by Roman armies in AD 70. The city of Jerusalem is taken by force. The inhabitants flee for their lives, never to return. The Romans take particular care to sacrifice a pig on the altar of God, thus defiling the Temple. The Jews have been wanderers ever since then, only returning to Palestine in 1947. The date figures heavily in the interpretation of prophecy, but we will not attempt that here.

The interesting thing about it is that the Jews rejected Christ, and so began the time honored custom of contempt the world has for the Jews. It is well for Christians to remember that while God would often use a heathen nation to punish Israel, he then accused that nation of willingly assaulting the people of God – and He punished them too. The principle is not without its evidence today.

The Jews rejected Christ; but there is no evil permitted by God out of which He cannot bring a greater good. In this instance, they rejected the Gospel – which lead to the Gospel being preached around the world.

Church and State

We come now to the relationship of the Christian to authority –which in our time is categorized by the struggle between church and state. Christ in this passage gives us the simple rule of thumb to be used.

So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they *could* deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor. They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But He detected their trickery and said to them, "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and being amazed at His answer, they became silent.
(Luk 20:20-26 NASB)

Rendering unto Caesar

May we begin with the obvious? It is the duty of the Christian in most places and most times to uphold and obey the government.[135] Why?

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[132] Daniel 2:34-35
[133] Isaiah 8:13-15
[134] Isaiah 28:16
[135] Romans 13:1-7

- First, because God has ordained such governments, even to the point of bringing a conqueror to the Jews and taking them into exile.[136]
- As history has shown, the spread of the Gospel is most pronounced in time of peace. One reason that the 19th century saw such an explosion of missionary efforts is the Pax Britannica (and the Victorian Christians who upheld it).
- Indeed, so important is good government that Paul tells us to pray for those in authority over us.[137]

But what about an evil government?

Evil in government

The principle for the Christian when faced with an evil regime is well known – and seldom followed. Revolutions are so much more fun.

- We are to bear up when suffering for the right.[138] The suffering shows the strength of our faith to all who will see.
- We are to serve God *whether or not he rescues us by divine providence.* Look again at the story of the Hebrew children and the fiery furnace – they didn't know that God would rescue them – they were content to be martyrs for God.[139]
- Indeed, we must recognize that suffering for the faith gives us the opportunity to present the Gospel to those who otherwise would not hear.

The principle is simple: do not overcome evil with evil, but overcome evil with good.

Christian life in a democracy

Paul never experienced a democracy as we understand it; nor Luke. So it is unlikely that they would have thought through the difficulties of a modern, American Christian. It is clear that there are some additional obligations for the democratic Christian. For some, there is the call to enter politics. Certainly there is the sense that Christians are to vote, for this upholds and honors the government.

The difficulty comes in this: there is such a thing as national guilt. Elijah was told that there was a remnant in Israel – but the remnant suffered the famine along with the rest of the population. We live in a society shaped in many ways by the common people in it. We therefore have a duty to change the government to reflect, as best as it can, the principles by which it will continue to stand, and standing, to rule in righteousness. At the very least we should suffer for the faith as the occasion demands; some of us will be called to bring the Gospel to a hostile nation.

Case in Point: America

It is with a naïve innocence that Americans assume that they are the answer to everyone else's problems. Americans – particularly political conservatives – are prone to state that what we have, everyone should have. For example, our foray into Iraq has as one of its objectives the establishment of a liberal (old sense) democracy. In short English, we think we've found the answer – and we are unblushing in our attempt to convince the rest of the world. This seems to many in the world to be pure

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[136] Jeremiah 27:5-8
[137] 1 Timothy 2:1-3
[138] 1 Peter 2:19
[139] Daniel 3:17-18

arrogance. It is not; it's just that we think we have found the answer and we'd like to share it. Sometimes, at gun point.

But we should beware of the examples given us in Scripture. Our Founding Fathers were almost entirely devout Christians; they held it essential for this form of government that the people need be Christians. It is clear that this is no longer the case. We assume that democracy will spread over the world; parts of the world are very resistant to democracy – for they see the religion of the democracies. Others see inside that – and ask how democracy is good for them when the society it produces can be sodden with so much sin.

Will America collapse, like all the other empires before her? I cannot say; but I can tell you from the past that decay comes from within. If the world's last superpower falls, it will be from within.

Will it fall? If example means anything, let America read the Old Testament and see how God treated those who were his people when they left him. The remnant remained; but the nation was punished. Some think this alarmist. But let me remind you of what has happened in my lifetime. When I grew up, divorce was preached as immoral, except for adultery. Since then the church (as a whole) no longer speaks about divorce. When the church said that adultery is wrong, no one listened then, either. So the church stopped talking about it. To the point that the congregation gasped when the preacher said, "Sex outside of marriage is wrong." We condemned divorce; now we accept it. We condemned adultery; now we accept it. We condemn homosexuality; but it's clear that this won't last very long. The next step is pedophilia. Would you care to speculate about that debate?

Reasons - Luke 20:27-48

Today Scripture gives us an opportunity to review the reasons for believing in the resurrection of the dead. Let's like take a look at how the Jesus handles the Sadducees in this question.

Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), and they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES, having a wife, AND HE IS CHILDLESS, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP CHILDREN TO HIS BROTHER. "Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife and died childless; and the second and the third married her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. "Finally the woman died also. "In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her." Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the *passage about the burning* bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB. "Now He is not the God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him." Some of the scribes answered and said, "Teacher, You have spoken well." For they did not have courage to question Him any longer about anything. Then He said to them, "How *is it that* they say the Christ is David's son? "For David himself says in the book of Psalms, 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET."' "Therefore David calls Him 'Lord,' and how is He his son?" And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."
(Luk 20:27-47 NASB)

Introduction: The Sadducees

The name "Sadducees" is supposed to have been derived from a priest named Zadok. He was a priest under King David and Solomon; he was the one who removed the ark of the covenant from the tabernacle during the revolt of Absalom. Under King Solomon he became the high priest. The Sadducees were the intellectual minimalists of their day. They accepted only the written law, and did not believe in angels, spirits or the resurrection of the dead. This particular sect disappeared after AD 70, the fall of Jerusalem. The scattering of the Jews at this time effectively ended their intellectual tradition.

Reasons I believe

There are many reasons I believe in the resurrection of the dead to come. Here however is a synopsis of the major reasons.

The character of God

- I believe that God is love. And therefore like Job, I believe that he will "long for the works of his hands."[140]

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[140] Job 14:12-15

- I believe the God is just. Therefore, he will want to reward the righteous[141] and punish the wicked.[142]
- I believe that God is faithful. Therefore I believe his promise that Christ will lose none of those he has been given.[143]
- I believe that God is eternal. Therefore, he is the God of the living, as Christ states here.

Testimony

There are three major sources of testimony to the resurrection. I list them here for you.

- The Old Testament prophets state this repeatedly[144]. Both in a veiled language and in direct statement, the prophets hold to the resurrection of the dead. (This is why The Sadducees rejected the prophets; their words disagreed with the intellectual thought of the day.)
- Christ clearly teaches that the resurrection of the dead will happen.[145]
- Likewise the apostles taught the early church precisely the same thing.[146]

The witness of man

It is a common well-known fact: the world is not my home. I hold the citizenship of heaven; and therefore I do not feel at home in this world. But if I hold the citizenship of heaven, do I then not have the promise of going home?

Also I have the Holy Spirit as a pledge.[147] If I am living the new life I should see its effects. And if I do, then I have the Holy Spirit as a witness the resurrection of Christ me that God will raise me from the dead.

The resurrection of Christ

it might seem at first glance that the resurrection of Christ is not particularly evidence that there will be a general resurrection of the dead. This is not so. We can garner from the character of Christ the facts necessary to show the resurrection of the dead. First, let us consider the eternal nature of Christ. As he is fully God, he is therefore eternal. But as he is also fully man, he can share his eternal nature with us. And he has promised to do so.

- The Old Testament clearly teaches us that our Redeemer lives for ever.[148] Job saw in the resurrection of the dead his only hope of seeing the justice of God.
- Christ's resurrection is a sign of the power that God has to perform that resurrection. If he can resurrect Christ, he can resurrect us.[149]
- Indeed, Jesus is described to us as the first fruits of that resurrection. From that we can conclude that we will be like him when we see him face to face.[150]

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[141] Luke 14:13 -- 14
[142] John 5: 28 -- 29
[143] John 6: 39 -- 40
[144] see, for example, Isaiah 26: 19
[145] John 5:28 -- 29
[146] 1 Thessalonians 4:14
[147] second Corinthians 5: one -- 5
[148] Job 19:25 -- 27
[149] Romans 8:11
[150] First Corinthians 15:23

- Indeed, the apostles taught that if there is no resurrection then Christ has not been raised from the dead. And if Christ has not been raised from the dead, we are still in our sins and we are to be most pitied of men.[151]

What will it be like?

The Christian naturally asks, "what will it be like?" From this passage we know some things. We know that we will not die anymore nor will we see death anymore. Because of our eternal nature, we are not given in the worldly, temporal relationship known as marriage. I suspect the reason for this is the nature of the authority given to Christ. In marriage, a woman is subject to her husband's authority. But when he comes again, he will abolish all authority other than his own through the Father. Therefore, authority relationships like marriage will cease to exist. Further, Christ here tells us that we will be like the angels, like the sons of God.

To understand what this must be like, we can look at the risen Lord and see the differences between his body before and after the resurrection. We see no further miracles, unless you count the fish at the lake as being a miracle. But we also see a body unrestricted by the cosmos. This is a body that can walk through locked doors. This is a body which can disguise itself from the highest of the disciples, until the proper time. The truth is we really don't know too much about this. It is as Paul put it, we now see dimly.[152] One thing we know for certain: we he will be like Christ.[153]

David calls him Lord

This short passage is given to us for a specific reason. Having silenced the Sadducees, Christ stays to give an equal reply to the Pharisees.

Warning

Note that Christ now warns the disciples. This last message is not really addressed to the Pharisees, but to Christ's own disciples. In particular, it is addressed to those disciples who will become the apostles, and therefore the leaders of the early church. He warns them of the temptation to which the Pharisees have fallen. Let us examine those faults in the hopes that we will not find them and ourselves as well:

- First, there is the desire for the honor of leading the church. The honor of leading the church is one which is very great. This comes from the fact that the leadership of the church must be indeed a self-sacrificing leadership. Men who devote their lives to preaching, leading the sheep, and rebuking the wicked are those who deserve the honor that they are entitled to. Such honor is great; but to desire that honor simply for the sake of having it is not honorable.
- One particular way of discovering this in your self is to see how concerned you might be with appearances. This is not a matter of whether or not you have a tie. It is a concern for how the things you say and do will be perceived by other people. When their perception, when their praise, when their rumor is your first concern, you have lost the real truth.

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[151] First Corinthians 15:17
[152] First Corinthians 13:12
[153] First John 3:2

- Indeed this leads to the darkness of the Pharisees. Under the cover of righteousness, they lined their pockets from the suffering of the poor. The widow's houses here are those which were given by their husbands to the synagogue for safekeeping, so that their widows might be taken care of. These Pharisees took that money and those houses and dedicated it to God - while putting it in their own pockets.

  If you wish to be in the resurrection of the righteous, then you must indeed be righteous here. The danger to the Christian is that of hypocrisy. Even though we see in the mirror darkly, as Paul said, we should look into that mirror everyday. Thus we should detect the first glimmerings of hypocrisy in time to rid ourselves of them.

  Our Lord will soon return. As he asked, will he find faith on the earth?

Little Is Much - Luke 21:1-4

Little is much, when God is in it:

And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all *of them;* for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on."
(Luk 21:1-4 NASB)

We have, on previous occasions, taught the art of devotion. Here is a sublime example of an act of devotion; the widow is unnamed; indeed, she may never have known how her devotion was praised by the Son of God himself.

What, then, is an act of devotion? It is a gift to God from one of his children; it generally meets these criteria:

- From the world's point of view it seems excessive and imprudent. The social worker would have told her to hang on to that money.
- Indeed, the world's view would be that the sacrifice can have very little impact at all. "Why would you do that?" is the question.
- Indeed, to the giver, the gift is a genuine sacrifice. It hurts.
- Usually, there is the opportunity to do less. The woman had two coins; she could have put in only one.

It is a sacrifice; as David taught us by example, we should never give a sacrifice which costs us nothing.[154]

The widow is the very picture of poverty. Christ has just finished warning the crowd about those who "devour widow's houses"; what a contrast, then, when this widow comes to make her offering to God. Therein lies the explanation. Her sacrifice:

- Is not just to "keep the Temple going." She is not sacrificing because her gift will be a good thing; she is sacrificing because her gift is for the Great One.
- Is accepted by God. He honors the gift from the heart; as your heart is moved to sacrifice, so is his heart moved with love for you.
- Is likely enough given with cheer, for God loves a cheerful giver.[155] There is a sense of joyful abandon to the devoted Christian; sacrifices are given with joy, because no other way seems right.
- Is untainted by sin. It is interesting to note that her two small coins were acceptable as an offering for the Temple – but the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas were not.[156]

The World's Way

For some of us, such devotion is unknown. We are reasonable people; an act of devotion is unreasonable, or at least irreconcilable with common sense. In fact, many Christians pride themselves on the reasonableness of their giving (and their Christian lives). Why is this?

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[154] 1 Chronicles 21:18-25
[155] 2 Corinthians 9:6-7
[156] Matthew 27:1-10

- For many, the primary reason is that their faith is weak – or nonexistent. They cannot see how God could use such a thing. But that is the very nature of faith; it cannot see. If faith could see, faith would be sight – and therefore not faith.
- For some, it is a lack of love. You can get a big check from them for the building fund – with the understanding that a grateful plaque goes with it. But blankets for an orphanage? Hardly.
- Some will simply tell you, "God won't care about my gift either way." He cares for you; He loves you. If your small child were to bring you a gift made in Sunday School, would you be indifferent? How much more, then, the care of God Almighty!
- Perhaps the greatest cause is this: we are forgiven little; therefore we love little.[157]

We see it as small; but "little is much when God is in it." How does he view such a sacrifice?

- He sees it for what it is: a mark of your love for Him. The monetary value may be small; He looks upon the heart.
- It is not only a mark of your love, it is a mark of your faith. When you sacrifice for Him, it says that you know He will provide. Interestingly, He never promises to make you richer, nor that you will be repaid in kind – He promises to care for you. It is not an exchange of value but an exchange of love.
- The acceptability of your gift is based not on what you give but what you have. God promises to use it in his power, and that power is very great. Do you remember the boy with the loaves and the fishes?[158]
- Indeed, even if the gift is so small as a cup of cold water for a thirsty man, God sees it and rewards it.[159]

Examples in Scripture

It sometimes does us good to learn by example, doesn't it? Here are a few examples from the Scripture itself:

- Consider the building of the original Tabernacle – the tent that housed the altar and the Ark of the Covenant. All the materials for its construction were given as free will offerings – by a people wandering in the desert.[160] Some of the items were from the Mediterranean Sea; they had little or no hope of replacing them.
- David, in his last days, prepared for the building of the Temple by his son Solomon. The gold that he gave personally was an enormous amount – something like a hundred tons of gold.[161]
- The Macedonian churches, in extreme poverty and persecution, gave money to relieve the famine of other churches.[162]
- Mary of Bethany, as she anointed Jesus' feet.[163]

But there is an even greater example in the Scriptures: the example of Christ at the Cross.

The Great Sacrifice

An act of devotion, a sacrifice – these are but the imitation of Christ. If you love Him, you will follow his commandments – and his example. Consider the example of Christ at the Cross:

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[157] Luke 7:36-50
[158] John 6:4-13
[159] Matthew 10:42
[160] Exodus 35:21-29
[161] 1 Chronicles 29:3-5. Note that the gold went into lining the walls of the building. Solid gold wallpaper.
[162] 2 Corinthians 8:1-5
[163] John 12:1-8

- First, it is an extravagant love. The Son of God, through whom all things were made, ruler of the universe, upholder of its laws – became one of us. Human, born like we are. Dying – as we die – but in a death of shame and terrible pain. Can you imagine what this cost Him?
- He did it not for the righteous, but for the sinners. Even the wickedest of sinners; Paul was such.[164] Despite his persecution of the church, Jesus selected him as the apostle to the Gentiles. Christ died for sinners.

This being so, and our highest duty being to imitate our Lord, what then should we do? "What would Jesus do?" as our young people put it today. How can I imitate my Lord in this? What acts of devotion are open to the Christian today? Here are a few:

- Give him the comforts of your life. Sacrifice that which is pleasant, like sitting in that easy chair and watching TV. Sacrifice your present; when his call comes, do not say, "Later." Do it now. Sacrifice that which is private; share your testimony of sin and redemption with those who need to hear. If you will do this for him, you will never lack for opportunity to serve in his kingdom.
- Sacrifice things material – that *aren't* tax deductible. Be a good steward and deduct what is lawful – but give without considering it. The IRS does not care how many hungry people you have fed personally. But God does.
- Sacrifice your time. Set aside time each day – deliberately and calmly – to read the Word, to be in prayer, to be in thought over your life and His ways.
- Combine some of these things. Go on a short term missions trip. It's easy to say that this will have no real effect for great expense; let God see to the effect. Make the sacrifice like this.
- There is one great area where we can be extravagant: forgiveness. Grant forgiveness to those who have grievously offended you; step up to the task of reconciliation. We are ambassadors of reconciliation; we preach the reconciliation of God. Let us practice it as well.

[164] 1 Corinthians 15:9-10

Prophecy - Past, Present and Future - Luke 21:5-38

When dealing with matters of prophecy, it is a good idea to take some consideration of the nature of the author of the book. Daniel was considered a learned man in his time; some of the minor prophets were shepherds. Many possessed the gift of poetry. John the Apostle was Jesus' closest friend on earth; his Revelation is the crowning work of prophecy. From these different types of men sprang different prophetic revelations, for God speaks to the prophets as well as through them. Style counts.

So, then, what is Luke's style? Let's review:

- Luke is the careful researcher of the New Testament. His words are researched rather than remembered. This limits some of the prophetic words; Matthew's account includes much more.
- Luke tries to include "what you need to know." He has no personal reminiscences to include (though he does show some discreet favoritism to the medical profession.) We should expect his view of the return of our Lord to be concise, inclusive – and covering all necessity.
- The main comparison to this is Matthew's passage on the Olivet discourse. You will quickly see that Matthew adds much detail, giving us the parables which reinforce our learning.

So you can see that this lesson will cover that which is sufficient for a Christian's knowledge. There is much more to tell, but the do's and don'ts are here for us to examine.

One thing more: please remember that we are trying to do this without reference to any particular (or millennial, or dispensational) scheme of prophecy. You may infer, therefore, that the author thinks one, or another, or all such theories to be false. This is not the case. Consider the paratrooper:

It is well for a paratrooper to have a complete inventory of weapons, tools and supplies; it is well for him to be thoroughly trained in them. But the essential is still this: a well packed parachute. Without that, the rest are useless. Today we will pack the parachute, so that when the time comes, you will be ready to jump.

And while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said, "*As for* these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down." They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, when therefore will these things happen? And what *will be* the sign when these things are about to take place?" And He said, "See to it that you are not misled; for many will come in My name, saying, 'I am *He*,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not go after them. "When you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end *does* not *follow* immediately." Then He continued by saying to them, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. "It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. "So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. "But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put *some* of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name. "Yet not a hair of your head will perish. "By your endurance you will gain your lives. "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. "Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are

in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. "Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory. "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Then He told them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they put forth *leaves*, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. "So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." Now during the day He was teaching in the temple, but at evening He would go out and spend the night on the mount that is called Olivet. And all the people would get up early in the morning *to come* to Him in the temple to listen to Him.
(Luk 21:5-38 NASB)

Prophecies

We must first remember that Jesus said these words almost two thousand years ago. It would be naïve, then, to think that none of these words had been fulfilled as yet. Equally, we should expect that there could be prophecy which is yet to be fulfilled. Which is which? There is much dispute; what follows is a system that has the advantage of simplicity; that which looks to have been fulfilled we will display as fulfilled. That which hasn't is taken as being yet to come. In all this, we must observe a certain humility; or, as Oliver Cromwell once put it to the Scottish Presbyterians, "I beseech thee, in the bowels of Christ, consider that thou mayest be wrong."

Prophecy fulfilled

Is there anything which could be seen as fulfilled? Yes indeed. The events relating to the sack of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70 fulfilled several elements of this prophecy:

- The city was surrounded by her enemies; that was the way a siege was conducted in those days.
- The city was sacked and her inhabitants slaughtered or sold into slavery. As was the custom of the time, the Romans practiced what is known today as "frightfulness" – the concept that everyone will hear what happened at Jerusalem and thus be more inclined to surrender. This included the charming practice of taking all the pregnant women and ripping their bellies open with a sword, leaving them and the unborn child to die in the streets.
- The Temple was destroyed – right down to the ground. The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem today was simply a retaining wall ensuring a flat surface for building.
- The Jews were then dispersed all over the world; returning after such time as was required, in 1947. The careful student will please note that the timing of this is usually dependent upon the theory being used.

But there is a curious point. Not all the prophecy in this passage is fulfilled; certainly we have not seen the return of Christ. But he clearly tells us that all will be fulfilled in "this generation." But look to your Bible's footnotes. The word can also be translated "race" (in the sense we would say "people group" or "tribe") or even "age" (as in "Middle Ages" for example.) The most common interpretation is that the Jews, as a people group, would not disappear before the coming of Christ. So far, this has most certainly been the case. Ammonites, Hittites, Philistines and such are long gone; the Jews are ever with us.

Prophecy unfulfilled

Christ makes it clear that there's a lot of history ahead. His first point is that the normal run of history – wars and disasters – are going to happen. There are not of concern to the Christian in examining prophecy. Fear God, dread naught.

But there is one thing of concern to you that is clearly prophesied, here and elsewhere in the Scriptures: persecution.

- The Christian will be persecuted by the synagogue – and, by a reasonable extension I think, by various religious authorities. Christ woos his followers with love; his enemies ram their religion down other throats. Sometimes his enemies call themselves by his name.
- The civil authorities, too, will persecute the Christian. It is the normal state of affairs. Religion which exalts "our tribe" will be met with favor; religion which ignores the boundaries of tribal or national prejudice will be persecuted. The "loyalty oath" has not yet outlived its usefulness to the state.

This is the normal state of the Christian: persecution, one way or another. Christ does not promise deliverance from persecution but deliverance in persecution. You will be able to withstand it; and if you choose to do so, you will stand with Christ on the Day of Judgment knowing that you were worthy to suffer for the faith. It is a great honor.

More than that, such persecution is an opportunity to testify for the faith. Of this we shall have more to say later.

What surprises Christians in this is the hatred the world feels towards them. In our own time there are people who consider themselves too advanced to fall for Christianity (the people who do must be mentally defective). They consider themselves "good people" – so it seems that good people must hate Christians. The sadness and pain of such hatred is greatest when it comes from your friends or even your own family. But make no mistake: it will happen that way.

Preparation

The future is coming (one day at a time, until The Day). So what should we do about it now?

The Don'ts

We begin with preparing our speeches – or rather, by not preparing them. While we are to have a ready defense for what we believe[165], we are not to be anxious about defending the faith on

[165] 1 Peter 3:14-15

public occasions – such as when the authorities ask us why we are Christians. The Spirit will provide both words and wisdom. It's certain enough for most of us that we don't have them naturally.

Another don't: don't be misled. We will see false prophets (Mohammed, Joseph Smith, and a bunch of others) and false Christs (none lately, but we find plenty who consider themselves fit to stand in his place.) Don't bother with them; ignore them, for they will soon go away.

Don't be weighted down, either. Do not engage in dissipation and drunkenness.[166] More than that, don't be weighted down by the cares of this life. So often we expect too much from others, and grow bitter at them when we are disappointed. Worse, we expect too much of ourselves, and become bitter at our own failures. Worst of all: God does not do what we expect, and we become a bitter weed on the side of the narrow way.

He tells us all this so that we won't be surprised. As Foghorn Leghorn used to put it, "Pay attention, boy!"

Do's

If there are don'ts, there are usually do's – and here are a few:

- Do have the endurance needed to live through the persecution – or die trying. Cultivate the patient endurance that cannot be defeated.
- Do pray for strength. The reason you fear persecution is that you are not strong enough to withstand it – so pray for strength.
- Do keep alert. Constantly examine yourself and your ways.
- Do look for the signs of the times. When you see them, get ready – lift up your head, redemption draweth nigh.

Signs of the Times

There is debate on exactly how to interpret these passages for "signs of the times." There is always the temptation to announce that the signs are there, and we are very close to his return. (Just because it hasn't happened yet means no more than it's one day closer).

- Some hold that Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies again. Others that this was fulfilled in AD 70.
- There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. Until recently, these were interpreted as being figurative (remember Joseph who told his brothers of his dream in which their stars bowed down to him?[167]), which is in accord with what is revealed in the Bible. Some, lately, have taken this in a literal sense.

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[166] Remember the Alka-Seltzer commercial line "Try it, you'll like it?" That's the world's way – but even then you get the upset stomach and headache.

[167] Genesis 37:5-10

- Most intriguing of all is this: Luke mentions only one slight parable, that of the fig tree. His hearers would have understood: the fig tree means Israel. When it puts forth leaves, you know the fruit is coming. The other trees would be the other nations. Have we seen the beginning of this in the restoration of the nation of Israel?

Finally, with great economy Luke comes to the end of the story: the Son of Man will return in power and glory. Note how he does this: he quotes the Old Testament. There is no description given here; isn't it clear that Luke assumes you already know what it will be like? Do not plead ignorance; rather, be ready at any time for your Lord to return.

The New Covenant - Luke 22:1-20

Much ink has been used to discuss the concept of a covenant; whole schools of Biblical interpretation have been formed to support one method over another. It is not my purpose in this lesson to give a definitive answer as to who (if anyone) has it right. We shall confine ourselves to that which is needful. Here is Luke's brief account of the institution of the Last Supper:[168]

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was approaching. The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how they might put Him to death; for they were afraid of the people. And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them. They were glad and agreed to give him money. So he consented, and *began* seeking a good opportunity to betray Him to them apart from the crowd. Then came the *first* day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover *lamb* had to be sacrificed. And Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it." They said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare it?" And He said to them, "When you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house that he enters. "And you shall say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' "And he will show you a large, furnished upper room; prepare it there." And they left and found *everything* just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover. When the hour had come, He reclined *at the table,* and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.
(Luk 22:1-20 NASB)

Providence

It is important to note the introduction of the passage. It is not an accident, nor is it a coincidence. It is the providence of Almighty God.

There is a curious parallel to this section. Saul has an experience as foretold by Samuel.[169] It is God's way of telling Saul that he is indeed king; that Samuel is not just some crazy old man but the man of God. Thus convinced, Saul proceeds to take the kingship in hand.

God works like that. Here, the details of "finding" the upper room are laid out in advance, so that the disciples will know that the small things are in God's control. They will need this; the next few days will be a horror to them.

It is a curious thing: many Christians will acknowledge God's control over the large developments of history, but not the small things. But His eye is still on the sparrow; even in the

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[168] A series of other views are available on the web site. Go to the search page and search for "Last Supper."

[169] 1 Samuel 10:1-7

ordinary things of life we detect his hand. Now sheltering, now disciplining, He is always there. If he controls the great, is he so limited that he cannot control the small?

The Passover as image

One way in which we see the providence of God is in this: he provides for us pictures – images – of that which is to come. The Passover itself is such an image. We see the sacrificial lamb – which was to be without defect. This is the image of the coming Christ, the sinless sacrifice. Those who accept that sacrifice – by painting blood on the lintels – are passed over by the angel of death. It foreshadows how the blood of Christ is our security against the angel of death; we are to live eternally.

Consider well the prophecy in the Bible. Is it not the case that, having seen the fulfillment in part at the first coming of Christ, that the rest will be fulfilled at his return?

Concept of Covenant

Christ here institutes a new covenant. The word is a "church word" for the most part; at one time it had a legal meaning as well. That usage has died out (it was used to restrict the future sale of homes by race), so we are left with the Biblical meaning.

First, rid your mind of the notion that a covenant is the same thing as a contract. It is not, though the word is often used for agreements between men. A contract is between equals (in theory). A contract requires the exchange of valuables; what valuable do you have that would place the Almighty in obligation to you?

Rather, it is a "take it or leave it" offer from Almighty God to us. There are four common elements which we will take as instructional:

- Covenants carry with them some form of sign. For example, the state offers you license plates for you car – on the state's terms, take it or leave it. When you take up their offer, you put the sign of that on your car in the form of the plates. What would otherwise remain unseen is now proclaimed.
- God's covenants (we shall look at historical examples) deal with the problem of sin and guilt. That's because He loves us – but sin stands between us and our heavenly Father.
- His covenants carry with them a present blessing. God knows we would "leave it" if there were only blessings in heaven. Therefore he provides us with blessings in this life.
- His covenants also deal with the future. They look forward to a time when they will end, and a greater covenant will be made.

Let's look at some examples:

Noah

- Sign: One of the most common of images in Christian children's literature is a picture of Noah's Ark. You usually see it on the waves or the mountain top, and often you see with it a rainbow. That's the sign God gave to Noah in his covenant: the rainbow.
- Sin: As Bill Cosby might have put it, He "drowned it right out." It is a simple method; get rid of the sin by getting rid of the sinners.
- Present blessing: Noah and his family were saved by being in the Ark.
- Future blessing: no more floods like that one.

Abraham

- Sign: God changed Abram's name to Abraham, Sarai's name to Sarah. Beyond that, God ordered that circumcision be implemented. (The implications of that are rather lengthy; we will slide over them.)
- Sin: God tells Abraham to make a sacrifice – of his own son. It shows that Abraham truly keeps God first. It also sets the groundwork for Moses and the Levitical system of sacrifices.
- Present blessing: At an age of 99, Abraham gets to worry about whether or not Medicare covers pregnancy – for Sarah gives birth to a son, Isaac.
- Future blessing: God tells Abraham that his descendants will be incredibly numerous and that one of them (the Messiah) will bless all the nations of the earth.

Moses

- Sign: The various feasts of the Levitical law, especially the feast of the Passover.
- Sin: the system of sacrifices for sin and atonement.
- Present blessing: God will call them his own people, take them out of slavery and by his mighty hand give them the inheritance of the land promised to Abraham.
- Future blessing: the covenant would be kept forever – IF the Jews would be obedient.

The New Covenant

We may now understand a little more clearly what Christ did at the Last Supper. He proclaimed the covenant under which we live – the covenant of the church age.

Sign

The sign of this covenant is given here: the Lord's Supper. Like the others, it is a simple thing. It has two elements:

- Bread – usually unleavened – symbolizes the body of Christ. In the early days of the church it was a common loaf; anyone could see that it fed the body of Christ on earth – His church.
- Wine – in those days, white wine was rather difficult to produce. Most wine was red – the color of blood, which it symbolizes.

You confirm your acceptance of the covenant when you take communion; you also proclaim to all who might be watching that you are a Christian. It is a sign for you; it is a sign for the world.

Sin

Of all things most powerful, the sacrifice of our Lord on Calvary is the greatest. You can see its image in the Passover: the spotless, unblemished lamb slaughtered, portraying the Lamb of God to come.

It is the atonement, though, that makes this covenant unique. The covenant with Noah destroyed sin by water; Abraham appeased God with animal sacrifices; Moses brought forth God's law in detail for those sacrifices – but this sacrifice actually atones for sin, cleansing us from it.

What makes this all the more powerful is this: Christ died for us willingly. His life was not taken; he gave it up.

Present blessings

Christians are often accused of thinking of "pie in the sky" as our blessings in return for a dull life here. It is not so.

- We have within our souls the Holy Spirit. As the work of our days becomes more complex, the Holy Spirit guides us in the simple truth.
- We have the power of prayer. No longer do we need a priest to mediate between us and the Father; the door is open. The light is on.
- Indeed, on this earth we have the church, designed by Christ and bought with his blood, which is both comfort and guide.

Future blessing

Compare these blessings to those of the older covenants:

- At the return of our Lord we will see the resurrection of the dead. Those in the ground will return and walk again.
- When he returns, he will bring justice with him. Rewards for the faithful; final justice for the wicked.
- Perhaps greatest of all is this: no more death. No more sin, no more death.

We are indeed the recipients of the greatest of covenants.

What should I do?

- Take the Lord's Supper every week – openly, with honesty, examining yourself, knowing exactly what you are proclaiming to the world.
- Accept the blessings of forgiveness – by admitting that you need it.
- Ask, seek and knock – so that the Father will be pleased to provide for you in all things.
- Finally, watch! You do not know the hour of his coming.

The Weakness of Man - Luke 22:21-62

One of the cheeriest facts of Christianity is the very sour picture it paints of human beings. All of us, with the exception of our Lord, are sinners. We just can't help it. But with Christ we can do something about it.

Today we will read a rather lengthy passage – in which Luke gives us a very good sense of the confusion and haste at the end of the Last Supper. We shall then examine the weakness of man in three examples:

- The disciples as a whole
- Simon Peter
- Judas Iscariot

"But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing. And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' "But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. "For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table?* But I am among you as the one who serves. "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me." And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "*No,* nothing." And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. "For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has *its* fulfillment." They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough." And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and *began* to pray, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, and said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation." While He was still speaking, behold, a crowd *came,* and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was preceding them; and he approached Jesus to kiss Him. But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, "Stop! No more of this." And He touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber? "While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the

power of darkness are yours." Having arrested Him, they led Him *away* and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance. After they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them. And a servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, "This man was with Him too." But he denied *it,* saying, "Woman, I do not know Him." A little later, another saw him and said, "You are *one* of them too!" But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" After about an hour had passed, another man *began* to insist, saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.
(Luk 22:21-62 NASB)

The Disciples

One of the most curious things about this passage is Christ's direction that the disciples were going to need the very things he had forbidden them on their missionary training. It seems a contradiction; but consider: he is preparing them for the short time he will not be with them. And what should we do when Christ is not with us?

- Grab the money. Take along the bag used by the heathens to beg money for their gods. (Or, today, start the telethon).
- Bring your weapons, for the power of Christ will not assist you, and there is no other option than the power of this world.

For three days this is what the disciples would have; it is no surprise they locked themselves away in hiding.

Asleep

Luke says they were "sleeping from sorrow." Mark tells us that Jesus had to wake them three times. How often we excuse ourselves by saying, "I'm too tired to pray tonight." Pray, then, in company with each other, so that one can always wake the others.

Indeed we are to "get up" to pray. Prayer should not be the item that lulls us to sleep, but that which awakens us to duty.

The Greatest

There is a deep difference between the world's measurement of the greatest and the measurement of God.

- In the world's measurement, we honor the biggest check. If you want to be a benefactor, write a big check. (Remind me to tell you about the school which wants to build a new chapel…. Naming opportunities, they call it).
- Why do we do it this way? Because the end justifies the means. You need to be a benefactor, we need a stained glass window.
- The plaque on the wall tells us all: we are willing to pay handsomely to be praised and honored. It goes along with being accepted in the upper circles of society.

Christ calls his church to a different method.

- We like those over us to be "public servants" – think of the fireman, for example. We accord them authority over us not on their monetary contributions but by their actual benefit to us.
- How much more, then, should the benefactors of the church be those who serve? Christ set this example; we should follow it.

Simon, Simon

Let us begin by stating the obvious: Peter has a big mouth. That's one reason he's the leader of the disciples. The boy can talk.

- But as he shoots his mouth off, do you see how little he really knows of himself? We think such people to be "open" or "transparent"; sometimes they are just ignorant of themselves, not knowing any better.
- One might suspect Peter of a lack of courage. How so? Have you ever heard a teenage boy tell you what he's going to do – as a method of bucking up his courage?
- Often enough, everyone looks to the leader to have the answer to any problem. There's a lot of pressure on Peter to "say the right words." He did.

Despite this, Christ tells Peter that his story will not end in failure; he will lead again. Jesus works even in broken hearts and lives.

The sword

It goes along with the territory: the man is a violent man. He knows he is a sinner, but he lets his anger rule over him. Sound familiar? Yet the Christian knows better than this – if only for this example.

There is something else behind it. If perfect love casts out fear, we also believe that perfect fear casts out cowardice. Peter is a man who does not want to have appearances taken the wrong way.

He's also a man who likes to be in control – and this night the situation is anything but in his control.

Intimidation

It never fails: the guy we can count on to be handy with the sword has no defense against social intimidation. Even after his promise to die for him, Peter fails.

And he fails in such a little thing! How often we think we will do well in the big things but fail in the little. Still true: faithful in little, faithful in much. But we say that little things don't really matter. Really? A little bullet can kill you.

What does it here? It is our desire to be "in." Suddenly Peter is alone, and his Lord cannot help him; he wants to be part of the group around the fire – not the one standing in the cold.

Judas

Judas stands as a mystery to most of us. Even the writers of the Gospels could not explain it except to say "Satan entered into him." The matter is one of the heart. Some have suggested that Judas was a little short in the moneybag; this might have looked like a good way to balance accounts. If so,

the amount proposed is interesting. It is exactly the price the law of Moses set upon a servant who dies.[170]

The style of evil

Have you noticed? There is a certain style to this evil betrayal, and it has not left us yet. You see it now in the sneering sophistication of those who are pious on Sunday after being "sophisticated" on Saturday night. There is a reason that the snake is the symbol of Satan.

Better not born

As for Christ's statement that it would have been better for Judas not to have been born, I can but echo Linus van Pelt (of Peanuts) when his sister Lucy announced that she wished that he had never been born: "The theological implications are staggering!" And I shall leave it at that.

Christ the example

We are not entirely bereft of example in righteousness. All are sinners – except the Holy One. See how he handles this night of terror and pain:

- He encourages the disciples. He paints the picture of their future reward as judges of the twelve tribes. He tells them that they will feast at the King's table forever. He brings to their mind how God provided for them during their missionary journey, with the obvious conclusion being that God will continue to supply his church.
- He leads them in prayer. He prays for Peter, personally. Yes, Peter has a problem, but Christ goes to the Father on his behalf. He commands his disciples to pray – to avoid temptation. He sets the example in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is a noble example; even the perfect man knows fear and the wish to avoid suffering. He also knows God's answer.

Not my will

Christ is not afraid to show the agony of his soul on this night of nights. He is afraid and he does not want to do this. He asks to be relieved of the problem.

The answer is "no." It is the measure of the perfect man in touch with God the Father, asking desperately for relieve – only to end his prayer with "not my will, but yours be done." It is the finest example.

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[170] Exodus 21:32

The Trials - Luke 22:63 – 23:25

(The reader should note that a more extensive, comparative list of the trials of Jesus may be found here. Luke is rather brief about this, which produces a differing view of the trials.)

The Expectation of Justice

It is a commonplace to most middle class Americans that ours is a system which renders justice. We certainly attach great significance to it; while most of us are not willing to spend several months on a jury trial, we at least expect it of others. Our system is portrayed as being honest, fair and dignified. One out of three isn't bad, I suppose.

You think not? We have a clear idea of what we expect of our system of justice; only when we get involved in it do we see that it is run by sinners and often works to sinful purpose. The problem, I submit, is our expectation of our justice system. We expect far too much from the sinners who run it. Indeed, it could be argued that given the people in it, reasonable expectations would be fearfully vile – and we might just be pleased at how our system exceeds those expectations.

Never expect justice

Kindly remember who and what you are: a Christian, a pilgrim in this world, one who is in the world but not of the world. Justice – either in terms of being fairly treated when accused, or properly rewarded for your achievements – will not truly come until He returns.[171] It is ***normal*** for a true Christian to be persecuted. This is, in a sense, not our fault – the world can't stand to see a real Christian, because in him they see Christ. Most of all they want to eliminate Christ; therefore his followers will be persecuted.[172]

The Christian's reward

Since you will be persecuted for Christ's sake, it is reasonable to seek justice – your reward – from Christ. Our Lord knows this; he also knows the pain of persecution (none better!); therefore he will be generous with his reward.[173]

It is difficult to think of this as being a blessing. Like Tevye on riches ("if riches are a curse, smite me!") we ask, "If persecution is a blessing, give it to someone else." But it is a blessing. Christ makes it clear; if you are persecuted for his sake, you join the ranks of people like the Old Testament prophets. Do you think he will leave them unrewarded at his return?

By commandment

Christ understands that none of us would like to volunteer to be persecuted. He also knows that we will be so persecuted. Therefore, to strengthen us, he gives us his commands on how we should respond to persecution:

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[171] Luke 21:12-19
[172] John 15:18-19
[173] Matthew 5:10-12

- Respond with love as much as you can.[174] Love is God's weapon; pain belongs to this world. Against love, Satan has no defense.
- Respond in the Spirit.[175] Do not worry about what you will say; just let the Spirit give you words.
- Respond with endurance.[176] You need only be patient and enduring for this lifetime; you were designed for eternity. A patient faith is the weapon of the conquering Christian.
- Respond with eloquent silence. When Christ was confronted with the ludicrous accusations of the priests, his silence was more powerful than their babble.

The Trials

Let us see what we can gather by the example of Christ.

Before the Sanhedrin

Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him and beating Him, and they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, "Prophesy, who is the one who hit You?" And they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming. When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council *chamber,* saying, "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. "But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF GOD." And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am." Then they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth."
(Luk 22:63-71 NASB)

Please note three things:

- Throughout the mockery, blasphemy and physical pain, Christ said nothing. Why? Because it did not suit the purposes of God to reply to this; Christ knew his purpose.
- He answers only when it suits God's purposes. For us, this would be only when the Spirit leads us to.
- He tells the truth – even when it's fatal. There are things worse than death.

It seems so much like Christ is conducting a suffering while they think they're conducting an interrogation.

Before Herod

So he consented, and *began* seeking a good opportunity to betray Him to them apart from the crowd. Then came the *first* day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover *lamb* had to be sacrificed. And Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it." They said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare it?" And He said to them, "When you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house that he enters. "And you shall say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' "And he will show you a large, furnished upper room; prepare it there."
(Luk 22:6-12 NASB)

Herod so much represents the way of this world. He wants to see a miracle. We might ask what's wrong with that; it often seems that the Almighty is particularly uncooperative in dispensing miracles at our request. It would certainly make evangelism easier, we think. But the King of Kings is

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[174] Matthew 5:43-48
[175] Mark 13:11
[176] Luke 21:12-19

not a tame conjuror to perform parlor tricks at our behest. For the wicked there is still only the sign of Jonah – the resurrection. See how Christ ignores Herod's desires. Herod thinks himself a king; Christ behaves like one should.

Because Christ will not jump through the hoops, Herod turns him over to the soldiers. Christ again endures in silence. He may be mocked but he is not defeated in this war of words.

See, also, how the sin of this action changes Herod's relationship to Pilate. Any sin gives the devil a handle to grasp you with. Pilate and Herod now share a guilty secret. They know the man is innocent, but both acted "for the public good" – meaning, what the mob wanted. Perhaps it seems strange; courage is a requirement for a successful politician.

Before Pilate

Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." So Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him and said, "*It is as* you say." Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man." But they kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place." When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean.
(Luk 23:1-6 NASB)

Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. "No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. "Therefore I will punish Him and release Him." [Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner.] But they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!" (He was one who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection made in the city, and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, but they kept on calling out, saying, "Crucify, crucify Him!" And he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt *demanding* death; therefore I will punish Him and release Him." But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices *began* to prevail. And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted. And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.
(Luk 23:13-25 NASB)

Remember, please, that Pilate was honest and noble at first. That is something you cannot count on indefinitely. Christians are sometimes misled into thinking that someone is an honest friend to us when in fact it's just the way the wind is blowing. For a time they will sail into the wind – but soon will turn about and go the way the wind is blowing.

This often yields illogical results. Why, for example, would Pilate flog him before releasing him? It's an attempt at compromise in a situation where there is no compromise. The Christian should expect weakness from the judge and harshness from his accusers.

The Christian View of Persecution

Satan only attacks the righteous

We sometimes wonder, "why me?" But remember Job; he was greatly blessed by God and greatly attacked by Satan. If you are a milk-water Christian, Satan need do little to turn you from the faith. Look also at Peter – Christ tells us that Satan wanted to "sift him like wheat." Even this saint had his difficulties, and was ultimately to die for the Cross. Things have not really changed; Satan still seeks whom he may devour.[177]

Persecution is the normal state of the real Christian

When persecution comes, we tend to ask "why me?" We try to work in the world with humility and love, and look what we get. Why would the world want to pick on its most loyal and obedient citizens?

- First, because the state – or the system, or whatever – claims the supreme obedience of the citizen. Sooner or later there will come a time when obedience to Christ is disobedience to the state.
- Next, because we are salt and light.[178] Our very presence reminds them of their sins. To justify themselves they mock us.
- Indeed, it is well said that their pride is offended by our humility.[179]

All of the godly will be persecuted;[180] indeed, our persecutors will be convinced that they are righteous in doing it – a favor to God.[181] It will happen to you; prepare your mind for it by meditating upon the example of Christ.

Blood of martyrs

Tertullian put it this way: "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church." It sounds grim; perhaps it is. Why, then, should we embrace this role?

- First, there is the eloquence of our scars. Does it seem evangelism is too difficult for you? Let your wounds speak of your faith; let them be the witness to how Christ is supreme in your life. Your words will be believed because of your wounds.
- It is our chance to become imitators of God, so that we may "be perfect, as He is perfect," We have the privilege of overcoming evil with good.
- It sounds paradoxical, but our Lord clearly meant it: to save your life you must lose it.[182] Life is no place to play it safe and only lose by a little bit. Put everything you are and have into His hands, and trust Him for the outcome.

We might answer: "I'm afraid. The power of the state is great; they will ruin me." Consider well whom you should fear: the one who controls the police station or the one who controls the universe?[183] Fear God, Dread naught.

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[177] 1 Peter 5:8-10
[178] Matthew 5:13-15
[179] Proverbs 29:27
[180] 2 Timothy 3:12
[181] John 16:1-2
[182] Luke 7:33
[183] Matthew 10:28

Reactions - Luke 23:26-56

"Socrates died like a philosopher; Jesus Christ died like a God." - Jacques Rousseau.

The death of Christ stirs the hearts of men. Mel Gibson made a movie based upon this, and the politically correct were horrified that he would dare assert the truth. Predictably, the film was not nominated for any awards. The modern world would prefer the gentle Jesus cuddling children. It behooves us, therefore, to examine the reactions of those nearby the Crucifixion. The lessons they show are with us today. We shall see seven of these vignettes, drawing lessons from them as we may.

When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus. And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him. But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. "For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' "Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, 'FALL ON US,' AND TO THE HILLS, 'COVER US.' "For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? "And we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last. Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he *began* praising God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent." And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, *began* to return, beating their breasts. And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things. And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action), *a man* from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.
(Luke 23:26-56 NASB)

The women

We must understand the place of women in that society. Rare indeed was the woman of influence and power. Most were like these women: spectators, feeling the pain, but having no power to stop it. Does that sound like you? Feeling the pain but unable to stop it?

See, then, what they did. They picked up the work assigned to the women. To touch a dead body rendered them ceremonially unclean – and this at the time of the Passover, the most sacred of Jewish feasts. They are examples to us in two ways:

- First, they have the servant heart. It is not theirs to change the world; it is only theirs to serve in the world they have given.
- For this, Christ reminds them that, given the way he was treated, they could hardly expect better.

Christ's prophecy was literally fulfilled about forty years later. At the end of the siege of Jerusalem, thousands went into hiding in underground caves – which the Romans sealed up, leaving them to die by starvation.

The rulers

Those who are lordly in this world have always had a problem with Jesus, the Christ. If you acknowledge who he is, then you acknowledge a lordship so high that it cannot be overthrown. If you will not acknowledge him, then you must sneer at him – for then his words must be foolishness. The sneer is with us today; the joke is always presumed. Righteousness must be funny; mocking those who attempt it is sophisticated fun. No one with half a brain could be a Christian; therefore those who proclaim his name must be fools and simpletons – or worse. After all, those weirdo right wing fundamentalists are a vast conspiracy, right?

Our response is simply to know that this will happen. He told us so. He also told us what to do about it:

- We are to overcome evil with good; hatred with love. We are at war with the world, and thus must not use the weapons of the world.
- We must always remember that the world will be watching our fidelity – if we don't have it, we're just like they are.

These people are a tough audience; we need to walk what we talk.

The soldiers

Pardon me if this interpretation does not match yours; I have been a soldier and know the life.

- It is a life of discipline – by fear. Reward arrived seldom; punishment was an everyday experience.
- It is a life of harshness. Soldiers are trained to kill; it is ordinary for them. It is therefore not surprising that a calloused disdain for life is present.
- It is a life of pride – your station is so low that pride must often be your motive.

The result of all this? A heart so hardened that even the death of the innocent man does not move them. They take what little pleasure they can from his death; the Lamb of God is dying at their hands and they gamble for his garments. They are hard soil; Christ told us we would encounter such.

The two thieves

The wicked react to righteousness in two ways, just as these thieves did. These men lived their lives as professional criminals. They knew the penalty and took the risk. Here they pay the price. Two minds in pain; two minds wondering about death; two minds dealing with their guilt.

One reacts as many do yet today. His troubles are somebody else's fault. It's not fair. To implement this thought requires someone to blame, or at least someone as a target of your anger. The first thief thinks nothing of blaming Jesus for this; after all, if he is who he claims to be, now would be a good time to show it. This Jesus fellow is obviously not doing his part.

There is something farcical in that; but I suspect that in the pain of crucifixion the thief's mind didn't see it. Jesus, get me out of this mess, so I can go on being who I am and what I want to be.

The other thief portrays the more noble course. He is being crucified for his own deeds; he recognizes his own guilt. Amazingly, he does not make the claim to be a better man than the first thief. He makes no claim at all; he simply begs. "Just as I am, without one plea."

And the lesson for us? Jesus opened the door of paradise for the second thief; we should not bar it for the criminals of our day. Do we bar the door at which Jesus would stand and knock?

The Centurion

The centurion reminds of a cardinal fact: the world is not nearly as impressed by what we say as by what we do. Our deeds give life to our words – if we have the deeds to match. The centurion seems to say nothing until Christ dies; then he acknowledges him.

The centurion is an obedient man; he has his orders and – no matter how unpleasant – he carries them out. It is a recognized point of international law that the guilt for such actions does not lie with the underlings who followed orders, as they are sworn to do. We should expect it. But we should also be aware that lives may change by the way in which we die. You never know who's coming to your funeral; so be sure to give the preacher plenty of ammunition before you go.

Joseph of Arimathea

Joseph – a figure of legend throughout the Middle Ages – is little known from the Scriptures. We can see a few things about him:

- He is a man of courage. To beg the body for proper burial is to irritate the powers that be. Joseph "screws his courage to the sticking point" and does just that – boldly. It is a style to be admired.
- He is a man of charity. By his light there is no way Jesus could repay him for this kindness. A great kindness it was, too, for Joseph made himself ceremonially unclean so that this man might be properly buried.
- He is a man of patience, waiting for the kingdom of God.

There is our lesson: as we wait patiently for our Lord's return, let us fill our days with simple charity, even if it requires great courage to do so.

Simon of Cyrene

(The reader will please note that I am indebted to C. H. Spurgeon for this section.)

We know very little of Simon. He was picked out of the crowd to carry the Cross. And he carried it. His sons were later noted as members of the church, but with that little information we must be content. He carried the Cross; that is lesson enough for all of us.

- Note, please, that it is *His* cross – not our own. The cross laid upon you comes from our Lord; do not reject it but carry it with the hope of glory.
- You carry the cross *after* He did. Whatever your cross might be, Jesus carried it first. If he gives it to you, accept it as royal favor from the King of Kings.
- You do not bear the cross alone but in partnership with Him. It will not be more than the two of you can bear.
- You bear it but a little while – yet to great honor. The only thing we know of Simon is his carrying the Cross – and that is honor enough for any man. Do not fret; your burden will slip free some day.

If you would follow the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, then you must – each day – take up the cross he gives you. You must deny yourself, surrender to him and carry the cross. Those who do will be given the crown of life when he comes. Today the cross is our burden; tomorrow, it will be our glory.

He Is Not Here - Luke 24

We come to the conclusion of Luke's Gospel, and a mighty ending (and beginning) it is. In this brief lesson we shall find three groups of witnesses to the resurrection of Christ: the women at the tomb; the disciples on the road to Emmaus and the disciples in the locked room. For each of these three groups we shall examine three things:

- What attitude and what presumptions did they bring with them?
- For what did Christ rebuke them? Is this rebuke still fitting today?
- What evidence for the resurrection is seen in their story?

We begin with the women at the tomb.

Women

Luke gives us a general outline of the conduct of the women at the tomb; John's Gospel gives us more detail. But let us stick to the text provided:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; and as *the women* were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, *the men* said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." And they remembered His words, and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the *mother* of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he *saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened. (Luke 24:1-12 NASB)

Attitude

Nothing is so clear as this: these women had no expectation whatsoever that they would find an empty tomb. Their behavior clearly shows that they expected a dead body. But see how they came:

- They came as a group – not in courage but in sadness and fear. The question of who would roll the stone away had yet to be answered. The Pharisees were alert for any attempt to steal the body. Would they even be allowed to perform this act of kindness?
- They came in obedience – for they waited until the Sabbath was over. Theirs was an obedient life.
- They came as soon as they could. At first light, before the sun rose, they were on their way.
- Most important of all, they came prepared – to embalm a dead body. It shows clearly that they did not believe that He would rise.

The rebuke

We must remember that in this day and time it was considered unseemly for a woman to study the Scriptures. Therefore the angels do not mention anything about prophecy; they talk of what these women knew for themselves.

- It is part of the rebuke that they experienced the terror of the angels. This is a huge change of heart, and requires some going to get there.
- The angels rebuke them for not recognizing Jesus as who He is: He is the way, the truth, the life. How, then, did they expect to find the Living One in a cemetery?
- There is no sense of reproach for prophets of the Old Testament; but they are reproached for what they heard with their own ears. He told them this would happen; why are they here?

It seems to me that much of this could be said of our faith today. There is no fear in our faith; we are comfortable. We see the gentle Jesus but not the Lion of Judah. We have been taught – but we have not learned.

Evidence

These women bring to us the evidence of the Resurrection:

- First, there is their own testimony. They clearly did not expect an empty tomb; they were not looking for revelation but they got it.
- The empty tomb itself is silent witness. They did not see him come out of the tomb – but they saw the results.
- They also bring us the testimony of the angels. The Law of Moses was implemented by them; now one greater than Moses has come.

The result of all this? Nobody believed them. Which, of course, is part of the testimony of the other two groups. When they told their story, they were dismissed as being nuts. Even Peter looked into the tomb and simply wondered.

On the road

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and *began* traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. One *of them,* named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. "But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. "Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see." And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is *getting* toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them. When He had reclined *at the table* with them, He took the bread and blessed *it,* and breaking *it,* He *began* giving *it* to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning

within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"
(Luke 24:13-32 NASB)

Attitude

If there is one thing we can gather about their attitude, it is this: back to business as usual. The man's dead; the game is over. So let's get back on the road again. It would not strike them as unusual to have a stranger come up and talk with them. The crucifixion would be news indeed to this stranger; he must be the only one near Jerusalem who hadn't heard the word. They reveal to us, however, something of their hearts:

- They had been "hoping" that Jesus would be the Messiah. They're not puzzled by events; they're disappointed.
- They had heard the account of the women at the tomb. They regarded it as wishful thinking.
- Indeed, some of the disciples had gone to the tomb and found it empty. A strange event – but nothing with which to change their minds.

The rebuke

It is a stinging rebuke indeed. The women could not have been expected to have studied the Law and the Prophets – but these men should have known. Greater knowledge, greater power, greater following – all these mean greater responsibility as well.

- He rebukes them for being foolish and – in an exquisite phrase – slow of heart. They do not see because they do not will to see.
- You knew the prophets; why didn't you believe what they said? With such a testimony, why do you doubt?
- Indeed, even the way in which Christ reveals himself is a rebuke. You will not see him in the prophets? Then let us turn to a greater testimony: the Lord's Supper, the witness of the sacrifice itself.

Is it not curious that they do not recognize him until they enter into the memorial of his sacrifice?

Evidence

This episode brings additional witness to the Resurrection:

- First, Christ brings to their mind the testimony of the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms. All those passages in the Old Testament which point to the coming of the Christ are now shown to them. Like a reader reaching the last chapter of a murder mystery, all is now revealed – and the reader is again among those who have been bamboozled. But this is no novel; this they should have known.
- If that were not enough, they have seen him face to face, Christ in the flesh. It would seem to be sufficient evidence, but as we shall see it is not.
- There is also the testimony of their hearts, burning within them. No one brings that out in men like Christ.

Jerusalem

And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." They *began* to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them

in the breaking of the bread. While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and *said to them, "Peace be to you." But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe *it* because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate *it* before them. Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."
(Luke 24:33-44 NASB)

Attitude

It must have been disconcerting to the disciples: here is another pair of witnesses coming in with a story which is completely impossible. We know from another Gospel that these two were not believed.[184]

It is important to distinguish something here. This is not the meeting with Doubting Thomas present. That will come in another week. This is a time when the disciples have locked themselves in for fear of prison or death. Nothing could be clearer: these men did not believe in the Resurrection.

The rebuke

Christ's rebuke to them begins with this: Peace be unto you. Peace. They are worried, they are in fear and doubt – so Christ does not begin with exposition or proof; he begins with peace. Blessed are the peacemakers.

He then presents himself to them. Look carefully; be sure you are not seeing a ghost. This is a body that has hands and feet; ghosts don't eat. He is material, yet not the same as before. The wonder of this has caused speculation down to our own time.

Again, he brings to them the Law and the Prophets and Psalms to explain to them what they should have known. He does not rely on one meeting alone; rather, he points out the evidence from long before – evidence which could not be cobbled together at the last moment to enhance an absurd theory. They should have known.

The evidence

He brings forth two types of evidence. The first is that of the prophets, which we have noted before. But the second is prophecy itself; he tells them that the Gospel will be preached to all nations. We see that being fulfilled even in our day. Again, we can read and heed.

Epilog: results

There are three evidences which are still available to us today:

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[184] Mark 16:13

- First, there is the preaching of forgiveness – being proclaimed to every tribe, tongue and nation. The good news is just that – good news. The Resurrection is proclaimed all over the world.
- Next, there is the power from on high that Christ spoke of. We have but to look back on the first century to see the explosive growth of the church – which could only have come from God.
- The result we see is the church today. As Gamaliel put it, if this is from God it cannot be defeated. If it is from men it cannot least.

The evidence is still with us. Now the question is, will we believe?