

THIS IS MY SON: LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

Notes For Lesson One: Introduction & Luke 1

Our Autumn class will be a survey of the Gospel according to Luke. For our introductory study, we shall first discuss our general goals and strategy for the study, and then shall take a look at selected portions of Luke, chapter 1.

Introduction (Luke 1:1-4)

In these first few verses, Luke sets out both his object in writing and his means of collecting and presenting information. The same principles will guide us in our own study of the book. We shall make every effort to listen to the evidence of those who saw and heard Jesus Christ, as Luke has collected and presented it. Our emphasis will be on strengthening our faith in Jesus Christ, and on nurturing a faith-based response to him in our hearts.

Luke tells us that his goal in writing his account is "That you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." He wants his friend Theophilus, and anyone else who reads the book, to be as convinced as a mortal human can be of the amazing and important events that took place when God walked the earth in the body of his Son, Jesus Christ. We call the narratives written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John the "gospels", which literally means, "the good news". God wants this news to be spread and believed as widely as possible.

Luke mentions two specifics about his approach, and he contrasts his account to many others that had been written, maintaining that, unlike these others, Luke has relied on eyewitnesses and careful investigation. In making this distinction, Luke refers not to the other canonical gospels, but to the many sensationalistic and biased stories written at the time about Jesus (just as many such disreputable and unreliable chronicles are written of various celebrities today). Most of these other accounts disappeared long ago, but the inspired gospels remain to edify us and to challenge us.

All four of the gospels have the same basic purpose of persuading their readers to place their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The gospels are neither conventional biographies nor straightforward historical works, but rather are carefully directed by the Holy Spirit, emphasizing precisely those things about Jesus Christ upon which God wishes us to rest our faith. In so doing, the gospels implicitly call for a response from their readers. In building faith in our hearts, they automatically call us to respond to Jesus in faith. The readers of a gospel are not expected to be passive, but are instead expected to be moved to respond, one way or another, just as every character in the gospels responds in some way to Jesus, either accepting him or rejecting him.

Each of the first three gospels - known as the "Synoptic Gospels" - has traditionally been understood to have a particular audience in mind. Matthew, who dwells than the others do on Jewish law, prophecy, and rituals, has always been understood to have been addressing primarily a Jewish audience. Mark, with his primary emphasis on action and events rather than on teaching, has been understood to have been writing first of all to Romans. And Luke, who more than the others emphasized Jesus' ministry in areas populated by Samaritans and other non-pure Jews, has always been considered to have been speaking to a "Greek" or Gentile audience (his friend Theophilus was probably Greek), or at least to a mixed audience. Of course, all of them

spoke of events and teachings that hold universal significance, and which reflect eternal truths. But note that of the three, Luke's emphasis is particularly appropriate for us.

In class, our goals and strategy will be designed with these considerations in mind. We shall focus our studies first of all on the goal of developing deeper faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ, and then on responding to him from this faith. Although there are many other topical, ethical, and theological matters that are touched on in Luke, we shall consider all of them to be secondary. Indeed, unless we can accomplish the first two goals, it makes little difference to God if we know intellectually the facts about Christianity, or even if we outwardly conform to Christian teachings.

To accomplish these goals, our approach will thus of necessity be a survey approach. We are not trying to absorb every little detail in Luke's narrative, but rather want to see the big picture first. We want to try to put ourselves into the gospel narratives, to consider the impression they would have made on us had we been able to be there ourselves. It would be an excellent idea to do further study on your own, either during the course of our study or afterwards, in order to read, examine, and meditate upon the many aspects of the gospel which we shall not cover completely in class time. Doing such study on your own is, of course, also much more beneficial and important to your spiritual health than anything we can do in one short hour together each week. We shall thus deliberately avoid answering every question or covering every particular, because it is important for you to follow up on your own time.

The Births of John & Jesus Foretold (Luke 1:5-45)

These verses detail not only the inspired predictions of the births of John and Jesus, but also show us the effect that these predictions had on those who received them and heard about them. These prophecies ought to help us see more clearly the hand of God at work, as he fulfilled his long-promised plan to send a Savior. These verses also challenge us to deepen our faith and trust in the things that God tells us. The news of Jesus can and should affect us in just the same way that it affected those who were eyewitnesses.

The birth of John the Baptist is foretold in verses 5-25. John's ministry was an important preparation for Jesus' own ministry in at least two respects. John fulfilled prophecy (see, for example, Isaiah 40:3-5 and Malachi 3:1 and 4:5), showing that God's authority and power were behind Jesus. John's work also provided a practical foundation for Jesus, by calling attention not only to Jesus personally but also to many of the basic topics on which Jesus was to preach, such as sin, judgment, and repentance.

The pre-announcements of the births of John and Jesus are important elements of the gospel message, because they demonstrate the care with which God laid his plans, and they prove that Jesus was not merely a good man chosen by God after Jesus had revealed how good he was, but rather was chosen in advance - indeed, as 1 Peter 1:20 tells us, he was chosen before the creation of the world. Even Christians would do well to show much more respect for the eternal nature of God's plans. The extensive list of fulfilled prophecies reminds us that God sees all of time from beginning to end, and that he knows how to provide a plan of salvation that does not depend in the least on the changing whims and fashions of human culture and history.

The account of the announcement of John's birth also gives us typical examples of the response that God's will, plans and prophecy arouse when revealed to humans. We see Zechariah, a

righteous and conscientious man, who nevertheless initially greets the message with some skepticism. So too, many of the most outwardly devout believers struggle with truly surrendering their own understanding and opinions to the gospel. We also see Elizabeth, as an example of simple faith, who is certain that God will do what he has promised to her and his people.

Jesus' own birth is foretold in verses 26-38. The coming of the Messiah was, of course, widely predicted in the Old Testament, and so this further foretelling to his human mother re-emphasizes God's authority, power, and control. As Mary is told, "Nothing is impossible with God" (verse 37). As above, this announcement calls us to accept the implication that God is in absolute control over human life and human history. Mary is somewhat curious, wondering how the promises she receives could come to pass, but she quickly accepts the truth in faith, and confidently awaits events.

The two expectant mothers have a joyful meeting in verses 39-45, followed by Mary's song in verses 46-56. Although the two women are filled most of all with their own joy, they are also aware of at least some of the implications of their miraculous motherhood. Their appreciation of, and praise for, God's power and love is a good example of how to express our faith even when we are not entirely certain how God will accomplish the blessings he has promised us.

The Birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:57-80)

With the groundwork fully laid, it is time for John to be born. Luke's description of his birth is particularly significant for the insight shared by Zechariah on the purpose and ministry that God has laid out for John. Zechariah's earlier skepticism has given way to faith and discernment, and his song at the end of the chapter is filled with spiritual insight.

The anticipated birth of John occurs in verses 57-66. Luke's description emphasizes the wondering response of the relatives, as they gradually realize that there is something unusual taking place. In their joy for Elizabeth, they initially see only the happy human side of the new child, and want to name him after his father. The parents must persist in stating that he is instead to be named John, as the angel had commanded them. The name John means "Yahweh (or Jehovah) has been gracious" - signifying both God's grace to Elizabeth and Zechariah, and his grace to all of his people, in sending John. Although the assembled relatives and neighbors do not entirely understand the significance of John's birth, it is obvious to them that the child is a special gift from God, and the news of him spreads rapidly.

With his speech now restored, Zechariah celebrates John's arrival in a song (verses 67-80) that not only expresses praise and gratitude, but also provides great insight into what God was doing. Zechariah says that "He has come and has redeemed his people" (verse 68), because he is aware that John is the first step in God's plan for ultimate redemption. Even though God's design is just beginning to unfold, Zechariah now has the faith to speak of it as if it were completed. He says of John "You will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him" (verse 76) so that the Messiah will "give his people the knowledge of salvation" (verse 77). Zechariah now is able to see and appreciate what God is doing, and just as John himself later will humbly give way to Jesus, Zechariah is able to rejoice in knowing that his son will simply be preparing the way for the Messiah himself. His song, celebrating salvation and redemption, and his attitude, filled with joy and humility, are both encouraging and are worthy of meditation and emulation.

For Further Study

Remember that for this week's topics, and for most chapters of Luke, our class study will be only a survey of the main points. As time permits, try to go back through these passages in more detail, looking particularly for those things designed to increase our faith in Jesus, and those ways we can respond to him in faith. A good general approach to studying a passage in the gospels is to ask first of all what reasons it gives us to have faith in Jesus, and after that, to consider what an appropriate response to Jesus may be, in light of the lessons it teaches on faith. The appropriate response may be indicated by others with whom Jesus interacts, or it may simply be implied by Jesus' teachings. After answering these two main questions, you will usually find that many other details become clearer, and that many of your original questions on the passage may be answered.

At any time in your study, if you have questions about Luke, you are welcome to ask me. See the separate handout for a bibliography containing sources, references, and suggestions for reading material if you wish to study Luke on your own.

- *Mark W. Garner, September 2000*

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THIS IS MY SON: LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

Notes For Lesson Two: A Savior Is Born (Luke 2-3)

This week, we shall survey Luke's account of the birth and early years of Jesus. We shall also briefly review the general goals and principles for our study, as we discussed last time. As we study these and future chapters, our main goals will continue to be building faith in Jesus and learning to respond to him in faith.

See last week's notes for an introduction to Luke, and comments on our study strategy. In particular, recall that the class discussion and accompanying notes are not intended to cover every detail in these chapters, but rather are designed to help you see the "big picture", the main points that are meant to help us build faith in Jesus. This then is the foundation you will need if you have time to go back through these chapters more carefully in your personal study time.

The Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-20)

Luke's account of Jesus' birth is the source of many of the well-known images and events that most persons think of in connection with Jesus. But Luke's intent was to do more than tell a heart-warming story, and he certainly had a more important purpose in mind than merely furnishing material for holiday TV shows. Those aspects of Jesus' birth which he emphasizes were deliberately chosen, not for their own interest, but because they are part of Luke's purpose of building our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The first seven verses of the chapter tell the well-known story of Jesus being born in a manger. Unlike a novelist or marketing executive would do, Luke matter-of-factly relates this extremely humble beginning of the life of the most important person in history. The intended message is first of all, that God's Son did not come to earth as a privileged, pampered aristocrat, but instead came from a most humble and down-to-earth family. But then, Luke also avoids fanfare for this humble beginning, as if to say, what else would we expect from a true Savior?

Some brief notes on the background to these verses. (i) Different Bible versions refer to Augustus' decree as either a census or a taxation. That is because Roman censuses were primarily for the purpose of calculating taxes. (ii) In setting the date, Luke refers to Quirinius as the governor of Syria at the time of the census. This used to be a favorite verse of atheists, because it has long been known that Quirinius began a term as governor several years after Herod the Great died (and thus after Jesus had to have been born). But more recent excavations have shown that Quirinius, a typical career politician, also had an earlier term as governor: at the time when Jesus was born. (iii) The "inn" mentioned by Luke probably bore little resemblance to a modern motel or hotel, being most likely more of a rest stop and dining place for travelers. Even the regular accommodations in the "inn" would most likely have been quite humble, and the area for the animals, where the manger was, would most likely have offered little privacy in addition to the lack of comfort and facilities.

In verses 8-20, we see the news of Jesus' birth begin to spread. On the one hand, we have the angels themselves announcing his birth, sharing the news, and explaining its significance. On the other hand, the primary human audience to this astounding development is just a group of shepherds who were attending their sheep overnight while everyone else slept. Luke's account deliberately raises the contrast between these two groups who first heralded the Savior's arrival.

As all of the gospel writers frequently tell us, Jesus was both the Son of God and the Son of Man. He was at once the embodiment of God's glory and authority, and also a man of flesh and

blood who suffered and endured all of the things we do. He was announced by angels, but seen by shepherds. Luke and the other writers constantly remind us to deal with both sides of Jesus' identity. In order to have a true faith in him, and in order to appreciate who he was and what he did, we must discover and understand both of these vital aspects of who he was. Any view of Jesus that only includes one side of him will always be lacking in spiritual vitality.

The Young Jesus (Luke 2:21-52)

In these verses, Luke selects just a couple of episodes that illustrate some important things about who Jesus was, and about why he came. Although Luke tells us more than do any of the other gospel writers, he still does not say much about what happened in Jesus' life before age 30. There were probably hundreds of other events in the childhood and youth of Jesus that would have made interesting or entertaining reading, but which would not teach us the most important lessons about Jesus' ministry and purpose. The gospel writers tell us little about this part of Jesus' life, but what they do write about is filled with meaning. Rather than speculate about what else Jesus did before he began his public ministry, we ought to consider carefully the few things about him that we know for certain, so that we can see the lessons that the Spirit is trying to impress upon us.

The first incident that Luke relates is the presentation of the eight-day-old Jesus in the temple (verses 21-40). As his parents are fulfilling the legal requirements for their newborn son, two persons with great insight and wisdom, Simeon and Anna, recognize the arrival of the Messiah. Both not only recognize who Jesus is, but also have an appreciation of what he really came to do. Unlike many in Israel, who expected the Messiah to be a political or military savior, these two realized that there was far more important business at hand. Their comments are both challenging and insightful.

Simeon first of all recognizes Jesus as the completion of hundreds of years of preparation, and feels a great sense of fulfillment in having been allowed to see him. He then goes on, though, to reveal that there is much more to Jesus than merely bringing a feel-good message of God's love and protection. He indicates that "The child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel", and that he would even be "a sign that will be spoken against", so that "the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed". The righteous old man knew that the true message of salvation would never be universally accepted because of human pride and folly, and he knew that Jesus would be loved and worshipped by many, but hated and feared by many more. This is still true today, and we would do well to remember Simeon's words whenever we may become confused by the ways the world responds to the gospel.

The comments of the prophetess Anna are not given in detail, but it is stated that she emphasized the coming redemption of Jerusalem, and spread the news to as many as would listen. Her response is a good illustration of the faith response that Luke wants to instill in his readers.

Next, Luke tells us of just one episode from Jesus' boyhood. One year when his parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover (as they faithfully did each year), Jesus was left behind* when they returned home, and after a frantic search was found back in Jerusalem discussing God with the teachers of the law. When found, Jesus made the well-known statement that "I had to be in my Father's house." Even as a boy, Jesus made it clear who he was and why he had come. It is also, of course, quite noteworthy to find such a young person being allowed to sit and discuss the law with the teachers themselves. Such deference to a mere boy would only have been possible with a demonstration of remarkable understanding and character.

* Note that his being left behind implies no negligence on the part of his parents. It was usual for fairly large groups of persons to travel to Jerusalem together, and also to leave as the same group, without necessarily traveling with one's own immediate family. It was a perfectly reasonable assumption on the part of Mary and Joseph that Jesus knew when the group was leaving, and was somewhere among the other travelers. Jesus stayed behind not because of their negligence, but of his own will, to make an important point.

Final Preparations (Luke 3)

Now, in chapter 3, Luke describes the final preparations that God made before Jesus' public ministry began. He gives us a brief account of John's ministry of baptism, and then mentions Jesus' own baptism. He also inserts a complete human genealogy of Jesus, before he is then ready to begin his narrative of the actual ministry of Jesus.

Luke gives a brief summary of the ministry of John the Baptist in verses 1-20. As we mentioned in our study of chapter 1, John served at least two important purposes. First, he fulfilled prophecy, such as the example that Luke gives from Isaiah 40 ("a voice calling in the desert"). Then, he also used his ministry to prepare the way for Jesus. First, he prepared the way by focusing the minds of the Jews on sin, repentance, and forgiveness, the root issues that made it necessary for Jesus to come and offer himself as a sacrifice. John's warnings and teachings all stayed very close to these main themes. Then, he also directly pointed to Jesus as the One who would come after him, freely giving him all the credit and honor, humbly realizing that Jesus was much more powerful and much more worthy of praise and glory. John had a thankless ministry, and he fulfilled it with great integrity, faithfulness, and humility. His earthly reward was to be imprisoned, because worldly leaders rarely appreciate the qualities that John had. But he is a lasting example to us of the faith and devotion that God values so highly in human beings.

John caps off his ministry by baptizing Jesus (verses 21-22). The sign of the Spirit, in the visible form of a dove, signifies that this indeed is the Messiah to whom John was pointing. Everything is now ready, and it is now time for Jesus' own ministry to begin.

Luke first interjects the human genealogy of Jesus (verses 23-38). The genealogy of Jesus is important in emphasizing that he really did come in the flesh as a physical human being, in the same manner as everyone else, and with the same fleshly vulnerability and limitations that we all must endure. It is also significant to trace his descent from the royal line of Judah and David, as Jesus is the fulfillment of many of the promises given to that line. Many of the names in the list hold little interest for us, but the fact that God's Son came as part of a human family is important to us all.

It is an often-asked question why the genealogies in Matthew and Luke differ so much. The popular modern explanation is that Luke gives the genealogy of Jesus through Mary's family (that is, that Heli would have been Mary's father). This and similar theories are explained in most of the commentaries on the list I gave you last week, and one or the other of them may be true. But the ancient Christians had a more specific understanding, which, though more complicated, does away with all speculation, and it seems reasonable to think that they may have had better opportunity to know the full facts. Their understanding had to do with Levirate marriage, the custom by which a man married his dead brother's wife and had children which were biologically his, yet by Jewish law were reckoned as his brother's. According to ancient church historians, this is what happened in Joseph's family: Joseph's biological father was Jacob, but Joseph's mother was the widow of Jacob's half-brother Heli (or Eli). Jacob was Heli's nearest surviving relative, and accepted the responsibility of giving children to his widow. Thus "Jacob begat Joseph" (as Matthew says), but also "Joseph was the son of Heli" (as Luke says) according to Jewish law. The rest of the differences then, of course, follow from tracing back separately from Jacob and Heli, respectively, since the two half-brothers had the same mother but different fathers. Matthew then probably chose the biological line because it went directly through all of Judah's kings, emphasizing for his mainly Jewish readers that Jesus descended from the royal line of Israel, and was thus the direct heir of the kingship. Either line would have suited Luke's purpose, for he was only concerned with

demonstrating that Jesus was a flesh-and blood human, with a real human ancestry and family. For full details of this ancient explanation, the best place to look is in Book I, chapter 7, of the *Ecclesiastical History (History of the Church)* by Eusebius of Caesarea, written in the early 4th century AD. The modern theories are explained in most commentaries on Luke.

For Further Study

As mentioned last time, our class study of each chapter will be only a survey of the main points. If you have time, read back through these chapters in more detail, looking particularly for those things designed to increase our faith in Jesus, and those ways we can respond to him in faith. As you have time, go back through chapters two and three, and try to imagine yourself as a witness to these events: the birth of Jesus, the first announcement of his birth, the presentation in the temple, the ministry of John. What would you have thought? How would it have affected your heart? These same events can still have the same effect on us today, if we open our hearts to the Word.

- *Mark W. Garner, September 2000*
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Notes For Lesson Three: Jesus' Ministry Begins (Luke 4:1-5:32)

In Luke 4 & 5, we see the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The inspired gospel shows us that, right from the beginning, Jesus' ministry was characterized by certain important features: opposition and rejection, miraculous works, loyal followers, and bold teachings.

We shall begin class with a brief review of our main goals in studying Luke: building a deeper faith in Jesus, and nurturing in ourselves a faith-based response to Jesus. We shall take a few minutes to go back over material in the first three chapters of Luke that helps us to achieve these goals. It would be a good idea, in your own study of Luke, to keep a running list of things you have found in Luke that help you to meet these goals in your relationship with God.

Opposition & Rejection (Luke 4:1-30)

All of the gospel writers make it clear that Jesus faced many forms of opposition, rejection, and persecution. The source of this persecution was the devil, and indeed Luke first shows us Satan's direct efforts to tempt Jesus, and then examples of human antagonism to Jesus and his message. It is worthwhile to consider why the gospels make it so clear that Jesus aroused so much opposition, since they easily could have dwelled solely on the miracles and other positive things that Jesus did. That he was opposed by the devil and by many unbelieving humans is not only true, it also is an important part of who he was, and of why we should have faith in him. Unlike politicians, entertainers, or most other public figures, Jesus did not come seeking popularity, or indeed seeking anything for himself. So he was willing to endure opposition and suffering whenever necessary.

The first thirteen verses of this chapter recount the well-known three temptations that the devil himself offered Jesus, just before Jesus began to preach and teach publicly. Attacking Jesus after a lengthy fast, Satan first tempted Jesus to use his miraculous power to feed himself, only to have Jesus respond with the famous answer, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God". Satan then offers Jesus an unprecedented amount of worldly power and wealth, on the sole condition that Jesus perform an act of worship to the devil. Jesus, of course, rejects worship of anyone other than God his Father, and likewise refuses to put God to the test, when Satan offers the temptation to jump from a great height to see if God would rescue him.

These three temptations exemplify the most powerful and most common types of temptations that Satan offers to us each day, and in that respect they give us practical direction on resisting those temptations. But more importantly than that, they give us reasons to have faith in Jesus. Although, as Hebrews assures us, Jesus was genuinely tempted in every way, he never once gave in to sin. When we honestly consider the many temptations which we cave in to every day, Jesus' righteousness is amazing, and is a sure indication that he is more than human. From a different aspect, the fact that he did undergo numerous temptations assures us that he is aware of how agonizing they can be. Hebrews 2:18 also tells us that "because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

Verses 14-30 tell of Jesus' return to his home town of Nazareth. He is initially welcomed, and indeed had received much praise in the surrounding areas. But when he begins to speak in the synagogue, quoting Isaiah's prophecy about proclaiming the Lord's favor (from Isaiah 61) and applying it to himself, the congregation became displeased, thinking that their familiarity with him disqualified him from assuming this kind of authority over them. Eventually, they become so angry that they attempt to kill him, but Jesus slips away without difficulty, as his time has not yet come.

This hardened response both sobers us to spiritual reality and encourages us to respond more positively. We see that Jesus was not willing to compromise the truth, either to protect his reputation or his relationships. No doubt it hurt him to be despised by those he had lived with for so long, but it did not change the message he had. As for us, we should be on our guard against our own forms of pride, and the ways we often think Jesus "owes" us something, so that we likewise do not harden ourselves to his salvation for the sake of pride, popularity, or other equally empty and pointless objectives.

Jesus Reveals His Power (Luke 4:31-44)

In performing the kinds of miracles that are described in these verses, Jesus revealed the awesome power that he brought to earth. He had power over diseases, evil spirits, natural forces, and many other phenomena before which mortal humans are usually helpless. As the apostle John said in his gospel, Jesus did so many miracles that there is not enough paper to describe them all. Those that are recounted in the gospels are merely a small sampling, selected by Luke, John, and the others in order to emphasize the miraculous powers that Jesus had.

Luke first tells us of a healing in Capernaum (verses 31-37), where Jesus encountered a man with an evil (or unclean) spirit. The demon, as he is driven out of the unfortunate man, even recognizes Jesus. Those watching understand enough of the situation to realize that Jesus has demonstrated authority and power over spiritual forces, and they are filled with amazement. Afterwards, Jesus goes to the home of Simon's (*i.e.* Peter's) mother-in-law, and he cures her of a fever. Soon many persons in that area come to him to be healed, and he puts on a lengthy display of his power. Several more demons recognize him, only to be silenced by Jesus as he drives them out. The most basic implication of these and other miracle accounts is that there is no force or power, either in the physical world or in the spiritual realm, over which Jesus does not have complete control through the Spirit of God.

Early on the morning after these events, Jesus arose and went to pray by himself. When the residents of the area found him, they were understandably reluctant for him to leave, but he tells them that he must "preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." This memorable comment clarifies the purpose of the miracles as well as the motivation for the decisions Jesus made. While the persons around him obviously considered the miraculous healings and other signs to be the "good news", to Jesus these only pointed to the true good news, the gospel, the good news of salvation, grace, and forgiveness. We also must not forget this. We must not read the Bible only to be entertained by Jesus' exploits, as if he were a cartoon super-hero. And we must not in our own lives be so focused on the earthly blessings God gives us that we forget about the most important, eternal, reasons to follow Jesus.

Loyal Followers (Luke 5:1-32)

Another constant characteristic of Jesus' ministry was his ability to draw to himself followers with great loyalty to him and great faith in him. The qualities that Jesus reflected did not attract everyone. But to those who were truly seeking God in their hearts, it was immediately clear that Jesus was a source of life and light such as never before had come into their lives. Thus, in the gospels we always see a clear response from anyone who encounters Jesus. Some choose to spend their lives following him, while others reject him and his claims, and by implication, also reject the salvation he offers. As the well-known verses in Revelation 3:15-16 suggest, there are really only these two decisions for us, and any apparent decision in between is simply a delusion.

Having before seen some examples of Jesus being rejected, we now see an example of the deep faith and loyalty that he could arouse, in those whose hearts were seeking God and whose eyes saw him clearly. The calling of the fishermen (verses 1-11) is well-known both for its own sake and for the dialogue Jesus has with Simon (Peter), after Jesus first astounds the fishermen with a miraculous catch of fish, and then reveals his will for them.

Simon's initial response is one of honest fear: "Go away! I am a sinful man!" Although there are important truths that he does not yet grasp, he understands the important principle that the divine can have no fellowship with the sinful or unclean. We too often find ourselves fearful of God, and in a sense we should, because we must never lose sight of our human sinfulness and weakness, or of God's perfection, righteousness, and majesty. But we also should learn to put our confidence not in our goodness or even in our love, but as John tells us, "we know and rely on the love God has for us ... there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:16, 18).

Jesus then uses the fishermen's amazement at what has just happened to explain his calling for them, saying that instead of catching fish, he now wants them to "catch men". Just as their hearts have been turned to him, he asks them to play their part in turning others' hearts to Jesus and to the salvation he offers. Jesus knows that there are many hearts not as eager as those of Simon, James, John, and the other apostles. He knows that many persons need further convincing in their minds and hearts, and want to see examples worthy of emulation, and thus that reaching them will require devoted followers, willing to undergo the same kinds of hardship and opposition that Jesus himself endured.

Jesus performs more miraculous signs in verses 12-26. In these accounts, Luke tells us a little more about Jesus' interactions with other persons. In the first healing (verses 12-14), Jesus' compassion on the leper is noticeable. Besides the healing itself, the leper had probably not been touched by anyone since becoming ill. The account of his healing of the paralytic (verses 17-26) is often studied, and contains many significant lessons. When the paralytic is first brought through the roof by his believing friends, Jesus makes a completely unexpected remark: instead of healing him at once, he instead says, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." The religious leaders watching immediately take offense, and unwittingly help Jesus to make his intended point. In curing the paralytic so that he could walk, Jesus implicitly proved that he had authority to forgive sins, which is 'easier' (*i.e.* less 'miraculous'), though of much greater spiritual importance.

Luke then tells us of the calling of the tax collector Levi, also known as Matthew (verses 27-32). In Levi's joy at meeting Jesus, he holds a banquet for Jesus and invites all of his friends to come and meet Jesus. Although the Pharisees look down upon this gathering of 'sinners', it is exactly the kind of opportunity that Jesus came to make use of. Levi has responded in a way that Jesus

appreciates, and as for the "sinners" at his party, from God's perspective they are indeed sinful and in need of forgiveness, but in fact no more so than the Pharisees, who did not realize it. This is what Jesus meant when he said "it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." By no means did he think that the Pharisees were not in need of spiritual healing - but because they were not willing to admit their need, he spent time instead with those who were more honest about their sinfulness, and who recognized their need for salvation and forgiveness.

In all of these interactions with the persons around him, we are given reasons to place our faith in Jesus, because we see how deeply he knows and understands humans, how sincerely he cares for them, and how willing and able he is to meet the needs of all who acknowledge their need. We also see the continual pattern of response to Jesus: joy and devotion from those who appreciate what he offers, and hardness and opposition from those who cannot admit their spiritual needs.

Preview of Next Class

A fourth basic characteristic of Jesus' ministry was his teachings. Jesus boldly taught lessons which were unexpected, and sometimes unpopular. He constantly challenged his hearers to reconsider their pre-conceptions and their biases about God and about humanity, and he cut to the heart of every topic, rather than seeking to become popular, or striving to prove his cleverness. Next week, we shall study a selection of these teachings, beginning with the last portion of Luke 5.

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**THIS IS MY SON:
LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE**

Notes For Lesson Four: Jesus' Teachings (Luke 5:33-8:21)

Beginning in Luke 4, Luke shows us that Jesus' public ministry was characterized by certain important features: opposition and rejection, miraculous powers, loyal followers, and teachings that were bold and unexpected. This week we shall look at the last of these. We shall skim over much of the material in these chapters, to get a good overview, and shall concentrate only on selected passages.

Since we did not get through last week's outline, we shall begin today's class with a brief overview of the important points in Luke 5:1-32, illustrating Jesus' ability to draw loyal and faithful followers to him. See the notes from last week's class for thoughts on these verses.

Jesus' Teachings: Religious Habits & Traditions (Luke 5:33-6:16)

One of the most noticeable features of Jesus' teachings was that he frequently called his listeners to reconsider the habits and traditions of their religious practices. This frequently resulted in clashes with the Pharisees and other persons who considered Jesus as a threat to their authority or influence. Jesus wanted our worship of God, and our service to him, to depend on God's Word and on God's will, not on human decision or authority.

We see an example of this when Jesus is questioned about fasting (Luke 5:33-39). The Pharisees had long been in the habit of fasting regularly, but rarely for the right reasons. As Jesus implied in Matthew 6:16-18, they made sure that everyone noticed their fasting, and their motivations were generally of a fleshly, pseudo-religious nature. The followers of the ascetic John the Baptist had also adopted the habit of regular fasts, most certainly with better motives, but this also made it appear odd when Jesus, evidently, did not expect his own disciples to fast on a regular basis, or at least not to do so visibly.

Jesus does not really discuss or defend the fasting habits of his disciples, but instead challenges the stereotyped religious thinking of persons like the Pharisees who measure spirituality purely in quantifiable terms. Most notably, he gives two illustrations of the error in their thinking. Just as a patch made of new material could not be put on an old, worn garment (because the new fabric would shrink when wet or washed, and soon tear away from the already shrunken garment) and as freshly made wine could not be put in an old wineskin (because fresh wine will soon ferment and expand, so it needs to be in a fresh wineskin that can also expand, not an old, hardened wineskin that would burst if fresh wine were put in it), as these things are true, so also it was inappropriate and ill-advised for anyone to expect Jesus, or the New Covenant he brought, to be in strict conformance with the old way of the law. This would have been true even if the Pharisees had understood and applied the law as God intended, but it was especially true because, as the next event illustrates, they frequently misunderstood the correct theory and practice of God's laws.

Jesus had frequent confrontations with the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath. He would not observe their man-made extra rules (6:1-5) and he frequently performed healings on the Sabbath (6:6-11). The Pharisees criticized him because, in their fleshly thinking, they had transformed what God had intended to be a beneficial break from worldly activities, and a spiritually healthy period of contemplation and observance of God's commands, into an austere test of personal

righteousness. Even worse, the Pharisees (and many other Jews) had serious inconsistencies in their Sabbath observance. Jesus reminds them of a significant event in the life of David - whose righteousness they could not dispute - to contradict their belief that the Sabbath and similar laws took precedence over genuine human needs.

Jesus' choosing of the Twelve was another, more subtle, challenge to the common religious traditions. In the Judaism of his day, as is the case today in most denominational religions, leadership was achieved by a human-prescribed course of study, and by meeting other arbitrary criteria established by humans in positions of authority. Jesus chose instead to entrust important spiritual responsibility to those whom God had chosen. He did this through prayer and by knowing what was in their hearts, not by looking for ways they had satisfied human authorities.

Jesus' Teachings: New Perspectives (Luke 6:17-49)

Jesus taught much more than a re-evaluation of outward practices. More than that, he wanted his hearers to re-evaluate their perspectives on life, on God, and on themselves. Some of his most memorable teachings are those that go far beneath the surface, and call us to look at everything from a new, more spiritual, perspective. There are several such example in these verses.

The blessings and woes (verses 17-26) repeat some of the "Beatitudes" from Matthew 5, and add along with them several "woes" that present another side of the picture. Even beyond the specific lessons in the individual pronouncements is the importance of the general picture Jesus is presenting. We see that what God calls a blessing or a woe is often quite different from the things

that we consider to be good or bad in our lives. If we look carefully at passages such as these, we shall see that quite often the times when we are discouraged or confused, thinking that God is not taking care of us, or that he has not answered a prayer, are in fact the result of looking at what is good or bad for us from a worldly viewpoint. For example, one of the most striking of all the blessings and woes is Jesus' statement "woe to you when all men speak well of you". To most humans, this would be counted as a great blessing, but God knows that a person who is universally popular has almost certainly compromised important beliefs, and has not remained faithful to the truth. On the other hand, we are so easily depressed when others are displeased with us, but often it occurs solely because we have done the right thing. "Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4:13).

Jesus next teaches about genuine love and mercy (verses 27-36). His well-known exhortations to turn the other cheek, and to make similar sacrifices, are vivid illustrations of the general principle that love is not perfect unless it is practiced towards those who do not or cannot love us back.

Jesus also teaches a lesson about judging (verses 37-42). It is one of our strongest urges to judge, to critique, to say how we would do things if we were in another's place. There are certainly times when we need to take such action, but Jesus wants us to remember to look at things first from the other person's point of view. He wants us to remember that "with the measure you use, it will be measured to you". We must be certain not to criticize out of emotion or frustration, but only after prayerfully being certain that we are acting in truth and in love.

Jesus' lessons on roots and foundations (verses 43-49) go to the heart of much else that he has to say. Humans so often are concerned with the outward, the physical, and the temporary, that they neglect the inside, their spiritual side, which will endure long after their physical body is rotting

in a grave, with its pleasures and exploits long forgotten. Jesus has no interest either in those who perform outwardly but have no inner devotion to him personally, nor in those who profess to have faith and yet fail to reflect this faith in their lives. Jesus is looking for spiritual integrity: the man or woman whose faith and life complement and harmonize with each other. This is good for one's own spiritual health and also attracts others to God. Jesus says that "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks", indicating that our words and actions are never accidental, but simply reveal what is inside us. Likewise, his parable of the two builders calls us to examine the very foundations of our relationship with God. We must build on the right things, or suffer the fate of the house on the sand.

All of these teachings convict us that Jesus did not come from our world, and does not think according to the pattern of this perishable world. He came from above, and thinks as one from above. His teachings also call us to respond by examining our own perspectives and foundations. It is easier to build anything, including a relationship with God, on a hastily improvised but flimsy foundation. But it is safer and wiser to take the extra time to build a house on the rock of true faith.

Jesus' Teachings: Practical Lessons (Luke 7:1-59)

This chapter contains two more miraculous healings, then a meeting with John the Baptist, and Jesus' anointing by a 'sinful' woman as he dined at a Pharisee's house. Jesus uses these events to teach, by implication, some important lessons that illuminate the purpose and goal of his life and ministry. All of these accounts are worthy of careful study on their own, but here we shall primarily be looking, as before, to paint the 'big picture' of what Jesus reveals about himself.

First we see the healing of the centurion's servant (verses 1-10). The gruff, battle-tested Roman soldier shows an encouraging faith and impressive insight into the nature of Jesus. It is no trouble for him, as one in whose profession proper use of authority is vital, to grasp Jesus as one in authority over the forces of nature. His request is thus not only selfless, but also reveals a faith greater than that of many who had many more reasons to perceive who Jesus was. Jesus uses the centurion as an illustration of how obvious it is, to those with eyes and ears, who Jesus was.

Next, Jesus raises a widow's son (verses 11-17). This is notable in showing us that Jesus' miraculous powers extend even over death. It is also significant in its fore-shadowing of another Son who also would, not long afterwards, be raised from the dead, and who would likewise turn his loved ones' mourning into joy (John 16:20-22).

Jesus then meets a group of messengers from John the Baptist (verses 18-35). Jesus uses this occasion to challenge us to consider our expectations of him, of God, and of God's will. By this time, things have gotten tough for John. His ministry has served its purpose, and he has been jailed and will soon be executed by the vengeful and foolish Herod. His followers are beginning to have a few doubts about God's plan, and come seeking re-assurance from Jesus that he really is the One who would come. Jesus puts his answer squarely in terms of the things he has been doing - his miracles and his teaching. He offers them and John no personal gift or blessing to encourage them, but guides them to examine what God is doing on a larger scale. As John knew all along, his role was a short-term one, with the expectation from the beginning that when Jesus came, John would fade into the background. After the messengers have left, Jesus then turned to the watching crowd and called them to consider their own expectations of John and himself. Despite the obvious signs that both were from God, many persons found reason after reason to discredit them, and to avoid taking them seriously. Neither was exactly what the Jews were expecting, because they had their own ideas of what their "Messiah" should be, and never

allowed for the possibility that, when he came, he would come to fulfill God's will, not their own. Rather than detail the specific things the Jews failed to realize, it is important for us to learn the broader lesson about expectations. We also must look to the Scriptures and allow God to reveal himself to us, rather than expecting him to be the kind of God we would have created if we had been asked.

The next event is particularly significant. As Jesus is visiting the house of a Pharisee, a woman known for her sinful life came to see Jesus, to worship him, and to anoint him with perfume (verses 36-50). The Pharisee struggles to understand how Jesus, a righteous man, could accept such contact with a 'sinner'. In response, Jesus uses the illustration of two persons who have had debts forgiven, one great and one small. Naturally, the one with the greater debt will be more thankful for having had it cancelled. Note that, when Jesus makes a distinction between those who have been forgiven much and those who have been forgiven little, he is by no means saying that the Pharisee was really in lesser need of forgiveness than this 'sinful' woman. In fact, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:22-24). The only difference is between those who realize how much God has forgiven them, and those who pridefully think that they are "pretty good" and thus do not think that they needed a lot of forgiveness. The attitude we take towards our own sinfulness will have much to do with how much faith we are able to develop, and with our ability to respond in faith when Jesus calls.

In all of these events, we see Jesus' ability to turn any situation into a call to examine our faith and our response to God's call.

Jesus' Teachings: Parables (Luke 8:1-21)

Any discussion of Jesus' teaching has to take note of the parables. Jesus frequently used parables, sometimes to communicate an important truth through a memorable analogy, but at other times to render his meaning clear only to the spiritually discerning. These verses contain the well-known sower parable, another short parable, and then another of Jesus' practical lessons. We shall see numerous additional parables later in our study of Luke.

In commentaries, there are often discussions as to which passages in Luke and the other gospels are actually "parables", and which are technically some other form of literature. As there is little spiritual edification in such debates, we shall not expend class time on them. A parable is really any story (whether purely fictional or hypothetical, or whether a stylized account based in part on factual occurrences) that has a moral point to it. Thus there are some passages in the gospels that are not always entitled "parables" but which nevertheless serve exactly the same purpose.

The well-known Parable of the Sower is told and explained in verses 1-15. You are probably thoroughly familiar with the different kinds of soil that receive the seed sown by the farmer, and with the basic lessons these teach us about our own possible responses to Jesus and his Word. But it is also important to consider the first priority that Luke has in his gospel, which is to build faith in Jesus. There is not really anything remarkable about the soils here, as each behaves just as one would expect. But it is unusual for a farmer to waste good seed by spreading it indiscriminately in places where he knows nothing will grow and last. This a praiseworthy and remarkable characteristic of God, that he expends good seed, not only on those who love him, but on those who do not, and even on those who never will. God gives every human the necessities of life, and allows gifts and blessings to come even to those who hate him. Jesus himself - God's seed in a particularly significant respect - came to die "not only for our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Jesus did not carry out frequent soil analyses,

as we often tend to do, but simply brought the truth to everyone. Our response also ought not to be a detailed analysis of ourselves - as fascinating as it always is to put the spotlight on one's own life - but to see the response that Jesus wants, and strive to develop the faith we need to be good soil for his word.

The next two short passages contain a short lesson about light (verses 16-18) and a practical illustration on the occasion of Jesus being visited by his physical family (verses 19-21). Jesus tells us that it never makes sense to cover a light, since one might as well just put it out. And he tells us that his true family is not necessarily his physical one, but rather those who hear and honor the call of his Father. In these short lessons, Jesus again wants to change our perspective, so that we can recognize the true light and our true family.

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THIS IS MY SON: LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

Notes For Lesson Five: Overview of Luke 8 & 9

We shall take this week to review and catch-up a bit. The only new material will be an overview of Luke 8:21-9:62, which contain several well-known and often-studied passages. These notes will give you a brief summary of these chapters, which we shall not cover in detail in our class time.

Overview of Luke 8:22-9:62

These verses contain several significant events and teachings, most of which are very familiar to us. We shall only survey this section, with a particular desire to see how these events reinforce the principles we have seen so far, in our study of the basic features of Jesus' ministry. The next chapter, Luke 10, begins a long stretch of material that is emphasized by Luke, but covered only briefly by the other gospels.

Earlier in the gospel account, Luke recounted the ways that Jesus demonstrated miraculous powers over demons and disease. Now, in telling us of the way that Jesus calmed a severe storm at sea (8:22-25), he emphasizes that Jesus' powers also extend to forces of nature. The account emphasizes both the disciples' helplessness and Jesus' own calm authority. The contrast is a significant one, and could equally well describe our own helplessness in the face of life's day-to-day difficulties, contrasted with Jesus' absolute control over everything in this world.

Next comes the well-known account of the legion of demons and the pigs (8:26-39). Once again, a contrast is shown, between Jesus' absolute control, and the inability of humans to withstand the same forces that Jesus dominates so easily. The unfortunate man who is possessed by the demons (actually two men, as we learn in the other gospel writers' accounts) is absolutely powerless to help himself. And the poor herd of pigs is thrown into chaos, and quickly self-destructs, as soon as the demons go into them. And yet Jesus himself has such complete authority and control that his mere word is sufficient to force the demons to go where they did not want to go.

Note on demons: the New Testament does tell us plainly that there were actual demons living on earth in Jesus' lifetime. The accounts of demon-possession are reality, not some kind of metaphorical description of disease, as is demonstrated by the fact that the demons frequently converse with Jesus. On the other hand, there are very good reasons for believing that this type of overt bodily control on the part of malignant spiritual beings cannot and does not occur at the present time. See me or consult the recommended commentaries for details.

Another significant aspect of this account is the contrasting examples of responses to Jesus. We have, on the one hand, the residents of the area, who are terrified of Jesus, who do not want to deal with him or his miraculous power, and who ask him to leave. But the man who was cured of the demons shows a deep devotion to Jesus, and an eagerness to tell others about him.

The next account ties together two separate healings, one of a chronically sick woman, and another of a synagogue ruler's dead daughter (8:40-56). Luke's narrative emphasizes Jesus' interactions with these persons and their needs, and shows us that Jesus had both power and compassion. The memorable healing of the daughter, after she was already dead, is also a reminder that it is never too late for Jesus to help. The synagogue ruler stood by patiently while

Jesus healed the sick woman, and kept his faith that Jesus could help, even after receiving the discouraging news that his daughter had died while he was kindly waiting for another person to have her own needs met.

Next, we see Jesus sending out the twelve on their own, probably for the first time (9:1-9). In contrast to his later instructions (under different circumstances), he stresses that they should "take nothing for the journey", but rather should rely on whatever hospitality is offered them. This will both help them to trust in God to provide for them, and also will help them to become sensitive to the various responses they receive when preaching Jesus.

Luke's account of the feeding of the five thousand (9:10-17) is one of the few pre-crucifixion events in Jesus' life to be told in detail in all four inspired gospel accounts. That is because the lessons it teaches are particularly important in any discussion of Jesus. The miraculous feeding teaches reliance on God, and also emphasizes Jesus' miraculous powers. There was so much food left over (more than they started with!) that these lessons should have been unmistakable. That the lesson was only partially learned, though, is shown in passages such as Mark 8:14-21.

Peter's famous confession of Christ is recounted in 9:18-20. Luke, though, does not deal with this in detail, but rather moves immediately to the comments Jesus made next in predicting his suffering and death (9:21-27). Although Jesus was surely pleased that Peter knew who he was, he also knew that Peter had only a dim conception of what it meant to be the Christ, and he knew that it would take a lot more before Peter and the others could understand a suffering Messiah.

The Transfiguration (9:28-36) is one of the most striking events in the gospel. Years later, Peter would remember it as one of the most powerful indications to him that Jesus was from God (see his comments in 2 Peter 1:16-18). God's statement to the babbling disciples, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him" is the source of our thematic title for these studies. In showing Jesus with Moses and Elijah, God is demonstrating that Jesus is both the heir and the fulfillment of the law and of the Old Testament prophetic ministry.

When Jesus comes down from the mount of transfiguration, he is faced with the other nine disciples struggling to drive out an evil spirit (9:37-45). Jesus heals the unfortunate boy, but also comments on the meager faith and understanding that surrounds him, and also once again predicts his eventual betrayal to a confused audience.

The next section, recounting some serious misunderstandings among the disciples (9:46-56), is often split into two or more "sections" in the NIV and in other versions that have section headers. But these accounts actually fit together, showing us in rapid succession three basic misconceptions that the disciples still have about Jesus' ministry. They still look at following him as a way to prove themselves and to draw attention to themselves (verses 46-48), they still have a territorial or proprietary view of religious leadership (verses 49-50) and they still take opposition and rejection far too personally (verses 51-56). All of these are typical of the kinds of basic struggles we also face in developing a more spiritual perspective, and which we must also overcome, as the disciples eventually did.

As an interesting complement to the disciples' struggles, we next see three different persons who cannot handle the cost of following Jesus (9:57-62), and who furnish one excuse or another for evading his call. These short incidents, and the responses Jesus gives to their excuses, remind us of the response that Jesus wants. As the disciples have just revealed, they still said and did many foolish things, but they had taken a huge step forward, beyond what most persons are willing to

do, in giving their lives to Jesus, and in leaving everything else behind to follow him. They knew there was no other source of life and light, and so, despite their many flaws and mistakes, Jesus was able to help them grow, and eventually was able to do extraordinary things through them.

There is much food for thought in these chapters, and if there are any of these passages that speak to your spiritual needs, I'd encourage you to study them on your own. You are also welcome to see me if you wish to study or discuss any of them in more detail.

- *Mark W. Garner, October 2000*

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**THIS IS MY SON:
LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE**

**Notes For Lesson Six: The Savior of the World, Part One
(Excerpts From Luke 10-12)**

In this lesson, we begin a large portion of Luke that distinguishes his gospel from the others. Much of the material in chapter 10 through the middle of chapter 19 is either not mentioned in the other gospels, or is mentioned only briefly. In this and the next two studies, we shall study selected portions from these chapters, which will re-emphasize some vital lessons and spiritual goals.

The Central Portion of Luke - Introduction

These chapters contain some well-known material, much of which is found only in Luke. We shall not, of course, have the time in class to cover it all in detail, but instead shall pick out a few passages each week that are of particular interest and importance. The accompanying notes for each lesson will provide coverage of those passages that we do not discuss in class, so that those of you who are studying on your own will have a complete, continuous reference to use. For more detail, of course, see the recommended commentaries.

The large portion of Luke from 10:1 to 19:27 is sometimes simply called the "Central Portion of Luke". Other commentators incorporate 9:52-61 into the passage and refer to it as "The Trip to Jerusalem" because of the statement in 9:51. There is, however, little suggestion in these chapters of a directed trip, and little indication of consistent progress in any geographical sense. It thus makes more sense to view 9:51 as a metaphorical statement of Jesus' intentions and perspective, being focused on his sacrificial ministry in Jerusalem as the end result of all else he did.

Regardless of these other considerations, it is clear that the theme of these chapters is the presentation of Jesus as the Savior of the World. The teachings and events described in them all emphasize Jesus' identity, purpose, and mission. Further, Luke also stresses, even more than the other gospel writers do, that Jesus's mission and salvation were for the whole world, not the Jews alone. In fact, many of the teachings and events in chapters 10-19 involve Samaritans, Galileans, or others who were not of pure Jewish descent. Much of the action takes place in the area known as Perea, inhabited by many Samaritans and Gentiles, and thus this portion of Luke is sometimes also labeled the Perea Ministry. These chapters contain several important and often-studied accounts that have no parallel in any of the other gospels, such as the Parable of the "Good Samaritan" (chapter 10, see below), Jesus' "Repent or Perish" lesson (chapter 13), the Parable of the Lost Son (chapter 15), the Rich Man and Lazarus (chapter 16), and numerous others.

Lessons on Priorities (Luke 10:25-42)

The last part of chapter 10 provides us with two examples of Jesus' teaching on perspective and priorities. The parable of the "Good Samaritan" and the episode at the home of Martha and Mary both give us insight into the spiritual priorities that Jesus wants us to have. Understanding these priorities is an important part of building faith in Jesus, and is also necessary to nurturing a faith-based response to his commands.

The famous "Parable of the Good Samaritan" (10:25-37) is itself unique to Luke, but it actually comes as a continuation of a discussion about the "Greatest Commandment", recorded also by

Matthew and Mark, and significant in its own right. In this setting, the famous injunctions to "love the Lord your God" and to "love your neighbor as yourself" are actually stated not by Jesus, but by a teacher of the law who was conversing with Jesus. This teacher had possibly heard Jesus give this answer to the question (probably asked of him frequently) as to what commandment was the "greatest". But the teacher, as Luke tells us, wanted to justify himself, and he asked the question "who is my neighbor", which gave Jesus the occasion to teach this famous parable.

The parable answered this question in a convincing and memorable way. It did so with a situation that would have been readily understandable - in fact, as Martin Luther King mentioned in a famous sermon in the 1960's, even today if you travel down this road it is easy to see how it would lend itself to danger from thieves and other malignant persons. And Jesus' portraits of the priest and the Levite were undoubtedly accurate, as everyone knew how pre-occupied they usually were with their ceremonial duties. But even beyond these, the parable also held great contemporary significance, in establishing the spiritual priorities of Jesus. By deliberately holding up the Samaritan character as more desirable and more spiritually sound than the priest and the Levite, Jesus challenged his listeners to concern themselves more with godly thinking and godly treatment of one another than with outward ceremony or with arbitrary, human-made religious credentials.

For our purposes, the parable also is significant in view of the two main goals we have in studying Luke. Jesus uses it to illustrate the kind of faith he wishes us to build - faith that does not depend on our social standing or on outward appearances, but on a genuine love for God and for others. Jesus viewed the "greatest commandment" not as a debating tactic, but as spiritual reality. Further, the parable directs us in our faith-based response to Jesus. Although the priest and Levite would have been described by all as having "faith", their faith was insufficient to guide them into a proper response to, and application of, the Scriptures. The Samaritan, instead, demonstrated his faith through a godly response to the situation in which he found himself.

A somewhat different lesson about priorities is taught through Jesus' visit to Martha and Mary (10:38-42). Martha's distractions were doubtlessly things that really needed to be attended to, and thus she was, from her viewpoint, quite reasonable in being displeased that her sister was not helping out. But Mary's choice, upheld by Jesus as a good one, is a good illustration of the response that Jesus is looking for. Mary saw past the activity and distractions, and perceived in faith that Jesus was someone she wanted to be with. Jesus wants us first of all to love him and to be drawn to him by faith. Then, when he does want us to "do" something, it is a simple matter to communicate it and to have us act. That is why Jesus preferred Mary's choice. As well-meaning as Marthas are, with their tireless willingness to pursue frantic activity, it is difficult to nurture any further spiritual growth in them. But a Mary not only gives Jesus what he most wants to begin with, she also can be asked to do anything, anytime, when it is really needed.

Warnings & Exhortations (Luke 11:37-12:12)

Jesus' talk to the Pharisees, at the end of chapter eleven, and his speech to the crowd, at the beginning of chapter twelve, appear at first to have many dissimilarities, but in fact they have the very same object. In both cases, Jesus uses warnings and exhortations to challenge his hearers to re-focus their energy away from themselves, and away from trivia, and onto more important matters.

The "woes" that Jesus pronounces upon the Pharisees and teachers of the law (11:37-54) are very similar to the confrontation described in Matthew 23, which took place a little later. As with many of Jesus' teachings, he doubtlessly repeated these same and similar points several times in

different settings, and it should be no surprise if we find very similar passages appearing at different chronological points in the various gospels*. Although Jesus and the Pharisees actually upheld many similar principles and teachings (note what he says in Matthew 23:3), they had fundamentally differing perspectives on what was really important in our relationship with God.

* Liberal scholars, of course, have little real understanding of who Jesus was or what he was trying to do, and so out of such minor, and often non-existent, "discrepancies" they conjure up complex and far-fetched theories of "how the gospels were really written". A great many of the bizarre and foolish theories concocted by such pseudo-scholars can be disproved by simple common sense and a basic awareness of the nature of the gospel accounts and of the nature of Jesus' ministry.

The Pharisees had arisen in the years when the Jews lived under the rule of Greek kings who wanted to "Hellenize" the Jews, that is, to make them like themselves, by eliminating their distinctive nature as God's people. Many of the Jews eagerly went along with this, to gain worldly favor with secular rulers. The Pharisees arose in protest to this, and indeed for some years their influence was valuable in preventing many Jews from going too far in their compromises with secular culture. The name Pharisee was used for this group because "Pharisee" comes from the Hebrew verb that means "to separate". But as time went by, the Pharisees lost sight of their original mission, and began to see themselves as the rightful supervisors of everything that went on in the Jewish community. From there, it was only a small step to assume the role they usually claimed in Jesus' day, as an uncaring and judgmental presence that created burdens in the lives of the average Jew.

Jesus firmly corrected several of the most important errors of the Pharisees and their way of thinking. Jesus used the illustration of "cleaning the outside of the dish" to critique their emphasis on outwardly looking religious, without dealing with their hearts. As a result of this improper focus, they neglected important principles such as love and justice, at the same time that they rigorously enforced the most minute and trivial aspects of their religious regulations. Jesus thus described them as "unmarked graves" - that is, as a source of spiritual uncleanness that was all the more dangerous because it was unseen - and as a source of burdens to the community, instead of serving as examples and as an inspiration to genuine godliness, as they once had been. All in all, Jesus said, the Pharisees and teachers of the law had "taken away the key to knowledge" (verse 52) and were making it more difficult for others to come to God. They themselves had completely lost sight of God himself, in the midst of all their artificial rules and procedures, and they made the situation even worse by binding these same impediments on others.

But none of this exempted the masses from their own responsibility to seek God and his will on their own. In the next passage, Jesus presents a challenge and exhortation to the crowd (12:1-12), making it clear that, since each one of them is going to answer to God individually, each of them has the responsibility to learn for himself or herself what is important to God. He even specifically warns them (in verse 1) against blindly accepting the hypocritical perspectives of the Pharisees.

Jesus teaches them several important spiritual realities, which are important also for us to remember, in building our own faith and in responding to Jesus' call. As Hebrews 4:12-13 also reminds us, nothing is hidden before God, and all will be revealed in the judgment (verses 2-3). It makes no sense to attempt to hide our actions or our natures from God. Instead, we ought to live in the awareness that he knows everything about us, even if it is possible to hide important things from other humans. And it is God alone who will judge us, not any of those persons whose opinion of us we so often think to be important. Instead of fearing persons or forces in this world, we should have the right kind of fear, a sober awareness of God and his omnipotence (verses 5-7). Jesus does not mean that we should cringe in terror of God, but rather that we

should be concerned with what he thinks of us, and should show him respect and deference instead of wasting it on other humans. The most important choice we have in our lives is whether to acknowledge God or to disown him (verses 8-12). Jesus constantly taught that there are only these two choices, and that any imagined position in between is at best self-deceitful, and at worst dishonest and hypocritical.

Overview of Other Passages in Luke 10-12

Here we shall give a brief overview of the portions of Luke 10, 11, and 12 that we have not discussed in class time. If there are any of these passages which you would like to study or discuss in more detail, either see me or consult the recommended commentaries.

Chapter ten begins with the sending out of the 72 (Luke 10:1-24). This is similar to the sending of the Twelve in chapter nine, but it occurs in a different setting, and leads to different lessons. This commission took place in a different area, in a region more populated by Samaritans and Gentiles than by Jews, and thus the emphasis was probably more to spread the news than to prepare the missionaries (the latter was likely the primary motivation for the earlier, smaller, commission). This account is also the source of Jesus' well-known reproof of those who were overly excited at their own success. His instruction that we should "not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (verse 20) is important to remember when we ourselves enjoy spiritual success of any kind.

The rest of this chapter contains the Greatest Commandment and the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37), and Jesus' visit to the home of Martha and Mary (10:38-42). See above for notes on both of these passages.

Jesus presents several lessons on prayer in 11:1-13. There is first an abbreviated version of the "Lord's Prayer" and then several other significant teachings on prayer. Several of these points were made repeatedly by Jesus in a variety of contexts. Note, for example, the close parallelism between verses 9-10 and Matthew 7:7-8. Jesus was well aware of the fleshly difficulties that most persons have in accepting the value and effectiveness of prayer. He later told many parables with this and similar points in mind.

Next we are taught some truths about spiritual reality in 11:14-28, occasioned by the jealousy many felt towards Jesus and his miraculous powers. Jesus wanted to develop a greater awareness of the nature of good and evil in his listeners. They needed to understand that God and the devil, good and evil, sin and (genuine) blessing were all part of the same contrast and conflict. They did not have the option of accepting Jesus' miracles without ascribing them to the proper source, and they also would do themselves no good by accepting his miracles but not their implications. Further, as verses 23-26 emphasize, we all must choose which of these two irreconcilable opposites we shall live for. We cannot simply sweep away the negative without actively embracing the positive.

Nor can they rely on religious or family heritage, but only on individual action and repentance. This is the point of the "sign of Jonah" in 11:29-32. The Ninevites who repented on hearing Jonah's preaching are an example of the response Jesus is looking for. He is not interested in hearing our arguments as to how many or how few sins we have committed; he is only interested in repentance and in our acceptance of our need for his mercy.

Jesus' lesson on the lamp and the light (11:33-36) is another one of his common themes. Once again, Jesus acknowledges only two genuine spiritual conditions. A person is either living in the

light or living in the darkness. Those who want to be in the light, but then cover it up, may as well just stay in the darkness, because light is useless unless it is allowed to shine.

The next two sections deal with Jesus' woes upon the Pharisees and teachers of the law (11:37-54) and with his exhortations to the crowd (12:1-12). See above for detailed notes on these.

Luke then gives us some teachings of Jesus on the needs in our lives (12:13-34). First, in the Parable of the Rich Fool, Jesus explains the folly of living only to store up treasure in this physical world. Those who live their lives in such a way are inevitably disappointed and frustrated, both by the fragile and impermanent nature of worldly treasure and also by our inability, as mortal beings, to enjoy even the best things of this world for more than a very short time. This parable is followed by Jesus' (verses 22-34), many of which also are found in Matthew 6. Here, Jesus not only tries to focus us away from the negative situation of living in constant pursuit of meeting fleshly needs and desires, he also wants to focus us positively, on developing a faith that allows us to be free of anxiety, and to live in joy and confidence in God's presence.

The rest of the chapter deals with watchfulness and preparation (12:35-59). Jesus gives several practical illustrations of watchfulness, as an exhortation not ever to become complacent or half-hearted in our service to God. Jesus then warns that his mission is not one that will bring universal peace, but rather will, by its nature, provoke division (verses 49-53). Although Jesus brings a message of love, and although God desires unity, God will not sacrifice truth solely to maintain outward unity. Nor should we be willing to do so. Living by the truth and practicing the truth will inevitably cause division, because there will always be many whose hearts are not in a condition to accept the truth, or even to tolerate it. As popular as it may be, compromising the truth solely to preserve friendships or reputations is an act of spiritual irresponsibility.

Jesus closes this sobering passage by appealing to the common sense of his listeners in preparing them for the future (verses 54-59). The average person knows how to tell what is coming in many everyday situations, by looking for obvious signs. Jesus wants us to be just a little more perceptive in realizing that there are equally obvious spiritual signs, if we look for them, of God's power and authority, and of God's will for our lives. We must thus, as he says in verse 57, judge for ourselves and make the right decisions, and stop passing off the responsibility on circumstances, on other persons, or on God.

- *Mark W. Garner, October 2000*
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**THIS IS MY SON:
LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE**

**Notes For Lesson Seven: The Savior of the World, Part Two
(Excerpts From Luke 13-16)**

This week, we shall continue our survey of excerpts from the middle chapters of Luke. These chapters contain a great variety of teachings and events that bring out Jesus' identity as the Savior of the World. Today, we shall select a couple of passages from chapters 13-16 for discussion.

As we did last week, in class time we shall only cover some selected portions of these chapters in detail. In the notes that follow, the passages scheduled for class discussion come first, and then at the end are brief comments and thoughts on the remaining portions of Luke 13-16.

Repent or Perish (Luke 13:1-9)

This is another passage found only in Luke. Jesus uses a couple of current events to spur the crowd to consider their deep need for repentance and spiritual renewal. But his message is by no means an entirely negative one. The main point of Jesus' parable about the tree is that God will allow us the time we need to repent, so long as there is hope. As Jesus so often teaches and demonstrates, there are two sides to God and to our relationship with him, and ignoring or de-emphasizing either aspect of God will result in an unhealthy view of him.

In his interaction with the crowd, Jesus refers to two recent disasters that had befallen certain hapless individuals, and which were fresh in the minds of his listeners. One group of 18 persons had been in the path of a tower that fell on them and killed them, while another group of Galileans was subjected to a brutal punishment by the hateful Pontius Pilate (whom we shall discuss further in a later lesson). These could quite well be paralleled by any number of similar calamities that happen in our own experience: airplane crashes, natural disasters, serial killers, and the like. Such misfortunes almost invariably evoke a similar response in those who hear about them, combining two distinct features: on the one hand, a morbid curiosity and fascination with these horrors, and on the other hand, wonder and speculation as to what they "mean". Many humans instinctively feel, as did the crowd in this passage, that there is a specific reason why certain persons suffer such extreme misadventures, while others never have anything so horrifying befall them.

Jesus tells the crowd that the real message is much different. There is, in fact, no specific reason at all why those exact individuals were gruesomely punished by Pilate, or had the tower fall on them. There is, instead, a broader message, a warning to everyone: life in this world is short and uncertain, and instead of hoping to accumulate enough "karma" to avoid anything awful happening to us, we ought instead to repent of our entire fleshly mind-set and lifestyle, so that we can prepare ourselves for the new, better, and more lasting life that will follow our temporary and fragile earthly lives. Whether a tower falls on us or not, whether we die in an airplane crash or not, our lives on this earth are all going to be short, and will soon be over.

In telling his parable about the fig tree, Jesus also makes an additional point. While our lives are indeed a mist that can vanish at any moment, at the same time God is patient with us, and allows us the time we need, as long as there is reason to believe that we may someday come to our senses and repent. Not only that, just as the fig tree was nurtured and given every possible

encouragement to growth, God also will nurture, protect, and teach us to give us every chance to understand him.

We should, therefore, make every effort to abstain from the ignorant speculations and pontifications that atheists, pagans, and even weaker believers indulge in, when they analyze the misfortune and evil in the world and try to force them to make sense, and try to search for the "justice" in them, in an earthly time frame and perspective. We can never "solve" these problems. God does not ask us to try to make this world a perfect place; instead he asks us to see its imperfections and learn therefore that we must prepare our souls, and the souls of others, for a better world.

Dining With the Lord (Luke 14:1-24)

As so often happens, Jesus here uses an immediate situation as an illustration of broader principles and deeper truths. As he is eating on a Sabbath day with a group of Pharisees, he becomes involved in one of his frequent confrontations with them over the differences between their religious perspectives and his own spiritual mission and priorities. He then uses the banquet setting as the basis for a series of illustrations.

These illustrations are preceded by his healing of a person with dropsy (verses 1-6). Healing on the Sabbath Day exemplified the differences between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus saw the Sabbath restriction on "work" as having nothing to do with physical effort expended for the sake of saving or preserving the life or health of another person, or even of an animal. In openly correcting their understanding of the Sabbath, Jesus also led into his banquet illustrations that follow. The Pharisees could not accept Jesus' spiritual perspective because they were locked into a mind-set of judging by outward appearances and of seeking human approval and reward. In both cases, they settled for this feeble substitute for a relationship with God because it was too difficult for them to see and sense the living but invisible God in heaven.

Jesus' comments in verses 7-11 are a basic illustration of this. As Jesus said elsewhere of their problem, "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God" (John 5:44). Likewise, even when they were generous in their giving of material things - which they often were, at least outwardly - they were always thinking of getting some kind of reward for it (verses 12-14). Both of these habits are not only hypocritical, but are injurious to our relationship with God. We really cannot ever build a genuine faith in God until and unless we come to the point when we ignore and disregard what other humans think about us, and are concerned only with God's opinion of us. And we shall never know what true righteousness and generosity are about, until we start to do good things without a thought of any reward whatsoever - seeking neither praise nor profit.

Finally, Jesus tells the Parable of the Great Banquet (verses 15-24). The excuses offered for not attending the banquet not only typify the types of standard excuses, offered in any age, for not following Jesus, they also bring out the larger point that Jesus is making about Luke's key themes of faith and response. As Luke emphasizes throughout his account, it is not possible, in God's eyes, to disassociate the two. It is not truthful to claim to have faith and then to make an excuse not to act upon it. Genuine faith always leads to a response. The master of the banquet saw through the excuses. Although they seemed rational on the surface, he saw that what they really meant was that his original invitees had no desire for him or his banquet at all, and he thus chose instead to seek out those who would really appreciate it. In the same way, the Pharisees

never really appreciated or desired Jesus, because they thought they were already in perfect spiritual condition, and felt no motivation to share in the spiritual feast to which Jesus invited them.

Lost & Found (Luke 15)

The parable of the Lost Son is one of Luke's signature narratives, a memorable and important teaching which none of the other gospel writers includes. The lessons of this parable (and the related shorter parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin) contain enough material for several classes. So in this brief discussion, we shall primarily look for the ways that the main points of the "lost and found" parables fit in with the overall goals and priorities of Luke's gospel.

The highlight story is preceded by the shorter parables of the Lost Sheep (verses 1-7), found also in Matthew, and the Lost Coin (verses 8-10), which, like the Lost Son, is found only in Luke. These two parables emphasize the primary points behind the longer parable to come. In our relationship with God, we are always in one of two conditions, lost or found. And God always wants all of us to be found, and will always do whatever is possible to seek us and save us.

The Parable of the Lost Son (verses 11-32) tells a story that involves many of our emotions, and that calls us carefully to consider our image of God and also of ourselves. You have no doubt heard many good lessons on this parable, and indeed there are a great many valuable points to be found in the account of the restless son who demanded an early inheritance, only to squander it and be forced to return home in shame, hoping for a small measure of grace, and finding love and forgiveness far beyond what he could have imagined. Let us focus here primarily on the broader points of the parable that relate directly to our main goals in studying Luke. Both the younger, "lost" son and his older brother teach us powerful lessons about faith and response. It is worthwhile to consider, and study further on your own, what kind of faith (or lack of it) that these two young men had, and how they expressed it. Both of them always had some kind of faith in their father, but both also had difficult lessons to learn.

The younger son always understood his father to be a source of great blessing and wealth. His problem was that he could not wait to enjoy it, and his first response to his father showed an immature and imperfect faith. In impatiently demanding his inheritance right away, he found only misery and disgrace. So too, many Christians see God only as a source of immediate blessing, and they are constantly baffled and frustrated that their earthly lives do not go as they thought they would. The Christian life was never intended to be full only of fun and ease. This son, though, came to see the folly of his ways, and began to realize another side of his father. Trusting that his relationship would at least exempt him from further punishment, he presented himself to his father with only a plea for mercy, and soon learned about the very most wonderful qualities his father had. So too, our response to God does not have to be based on a complete knowledge of all that he is and of all that he wants, but if it is a faith-based response, done in the knowledge that he wants to know us and care for us, this will enable God to teach us the rest of what he wants us to know.

The older son, likewise, had defects in his faith. While he perhaps understood his father's importance, authority, and righteousness, he never appreciated his father's love and generosity. He did not have, because he did not ask. He too learned an important lesson about his father. So too, we must learn to rejoice in God's forgiveness for others, and not see that forgiveness as a sign that God loves us any less. As in the shorter parables of the sheep and the coin, it is only

natural that there be more rejoicing over a newly saved soul than over the already saved. If we feel we are not being appreciated, or that we never had a similar reception, perhaps like this older son we have never stopped to appreciate what God has already given us and done for us.

Either/Or ("The Rich Man & Lazarus", Luke 16:19-31)

Jesus' narrative of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus emphasizes the gulf between the saved and the lost, and was meant to provoke his hearers to a sober evaluation of their standing with God. Jesus uses the story to emphasize that there will be no second chance for those who ignore God's call, and that God has already given them everything they need to find the truth - there will be no personalized communication for those who just aren't convinced by what God has already said.

Not basically, this anecdote re-emphasizes Jesus' lesson that our earthly condition and status are not nearly as important as the eternal condition which our present decisions will create for us. The rich man had enjoyed good things all his life, but now it was gone, and nothing he had in the physical world could make up for his agony now. Likewise, all of the beggar's pain, loneliness, and despair are long forgotten as he lives in God's presence, content and secure. Nor is there any intermediate condition, as many fleshly thinkers think there ought to be, but only eternity with God or eternity without God.

Nor can any of the rich man's requests be honored now. Once we see the afterlife in all its clarity, it is too late to admit we were wrong or to change our fate. Those who stubbornly wait until God gives them mathematical proof of an afterlife will never believe, and God will not give in to their pride, for pride is all that it is when a human thinks God has not provided us with sufficient reasons for faith. As the rich man was told, about his living relatives who were still in their sin, "They have Moses and the Prophets", and if they ignored that divine warning, they were without any excuse.

Other Material in Luke 13-16

These chapters begin with Jesus' "repent or perish" lesson (13:1-9). See above for detailed notes on this passage.

This is followed by the healing of a crippled woman on the Sabbath (13:10-17). As often happened, many of the Jews were indignant that Jesus had "violated" the Sabbath, whereas all he had really done was to disregard their human-made rules about it. Their hardness of heart was so strong that they were always blinded to the blessing and relief that Jesus brought into the lives of those he healed, and could only see that he did not obey the same rules that they followed.

Two short parables about the kingdom of God follow (13:18-21). The parable of the mustard seed describes the nature of the kingdom as being visibly small, but holding potential for great growth and power. The parable of the yeast exemplifies a similar principle, that of the kingdom's ability to expand and spread, just as Jesus later directed his followers to take the gospel to the whole world.

The next two accounts are sobering lessons about God's judgment (13:22-35). In his exposition of "the narrow door", (verses 22-30) a more involved explanation of a point made briefly in Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus emphatically tells us that by no means will the majority of humanity be

saved. In fact, he expresses this in several different ways, as do other Scriptures such as 1 Peter 4:17-18. Then, in response to a warning about King Herod's efforts to kill him, Jesus laments, not for himself - for he will indeed die, although not at Herod's hands - but for Jerusalem (verses 31-35). The great city that had seen so many miracles and that had been blessed so many times would soon be known only for sorrow and destruction, in large part because they rejected God's Anointed.

Jesus' lessons taught while eating with the Pharisees (14:1-24) are covered in detail above.

The series of illustrations in 14:25-35 teach us to consider the costs involved in following Jesus. They give us important insight into the kind of response Jesus is looking for. He does not want anyone to follow him impulsively, with no understanding of what is involved (and certainly not with a false impression of what is involved), but he wants us to be aware from the beginning that it will involve risks and sacrifices. Of course, there are those who twist this passage into an unholy and legalistic burden on those who wish to become Christians, demanding that they prove themselves by human standards first. But we must not allow such false teachings to cause us to discard the importance of teaching, in all honesty and truthfulness, what it means to obey and follow the gospel.

Chapter 15 contains the "lost and found" parables. See detailed comments above.

The Parable of the Dishonest Manager (16:1-15) is another passage unique to Luke, and is unusual in that Jesus openly commends someone whose actions were, in one respect, sinful. But he does this deliberately, in order to make his point. He could, of course, have used an example of someone who honestly used his position to accomplish desirable goals, but that is not what he wanted to say. His point was different, as he says in verse 8, "the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light". He is calling his followers to set aside any naive ideas about the world's innocence, and to pay careful attention, to both opportunities and risks.

Two brief lessons follow. Jesus' comments in 16:16-17 are meant to stress, as he often did, that he did not claim to bring a brand-new revelation from God, but that what he (and his predecessor John) was doing came as the culmination of all that God had done before. The strict teaching about marriage and divorce in 16:18 is, in one sense, disconnected from the rest of the chapter, but it also exemplifies what Jesus was doing. It is likely that Luke excerpted this from a much longer exposition. The old law condemned divorce in theory, but presented many loopholes in practice. But Jesus brought a higher standard for marriage and divorce, just as he did for such things as anger, hatred, and adultery (compare Matthew 5:21-32).

- *Mark W. Garner, October 2000*
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**THIS IS MY SON:
LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE**

**Notes For Lesson Eight: The Savior of the World, Part Three
(Excerpts From Luke 17:1-19:27)**

This week's study will complete our three-week survey of excerpts from the long middle portion of Luke, which presents Jesus as the Savior of the world through his teachings and through events in his ministry. As in the notes for the past two weeks, the comments on the passages to be studied in class come first, followed by shorter notes on the other passages in these chapters.

The Thankful Leper (Luke 17:11-19)

This is yet another incident related only by Luke among the gospels, and like several of the others, it emphasizes the universal nature of Jesus' call and ministry. The account of the ten lepers - nine who were happy but not especially grateful, and one who was both - calls us to consider our own thankfulness, and our way of expressing it, in return for what God has done for us. As is often commented upon, the life of a leper in the ancient world was a miserable one, without hope or comfort. These ten lepers thus received the blessing of a lifetime when Jesus suddenly healed them of their affliction. Not only did they in an instant become physically whole, they also could return to live a normal life, and no longer had to be isolated from healthy persons. It is not hard to understand why they ran off in joy and excitement, leaving behind not only their old way of life, but also the healer who had released them from it.

One leper remembered, in the midst of his joy, that he had a benefactor to whom he should be grateful, and this thankful leper came back to Jesus and thanked him sincerely and wholeheartedly. Luke specifically mentions that the thankful leper was a Samaritan, as he is always looking for ways to remind us that Jesus' ministry was a universal one. There is also a subtle reminder in this - not just for the contemporary audience, but for today's believers as well - that it is often those who have the most spiritual blessings who are the most neglectful when it comes to expressing gratitude.

We can all understand the feeling of joy that so overpowered the other lepers that they did not think to return and thank Jesus. But Jesus implicitly reproves them for their lack of gratitude, when he says, "Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" God understands why we are so often unthankful to him - he understands that we are sometimes too busy, sometimes too happy, and sometimes too tired to thank him - but he still desires and expects us to take the time to thank him for the many great blessings he gives us. There are many expressions of his love that we shall never even notice, and so it is hardly unreasonable for him to hope that we will thank him for the blessings that we do see.

The Disappointed Seeker (Luke 18:18-30)

This passage, more commonly known as "The Rich Ruler" or, in the other gospels, "The Rich Young Man", teaches a powerful lesson about the heart that Jesus seeks. It is a most challenging passage for study, in its implication that to receive eternal life we must be ready to do that which is literally impossible for humans to do on their own. We are certainly meant to place ourselves in this man's place, even if we are not "rich" or a "ruler" in our own minds. For we also are hindered by the very same impediments to spiritual life that sent this seeker away disappointed.

In asking for eternal life, this seeker relies on having obeyed God's commands: "All these I have kept since I was a boy" (verse 21). Jesus does not even bother to correct the man's (common)

misconception that it is somehow possible to keep all the commands literally - for "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) - but instead he goes directly into the man's heart. Certainly, it is good to obey God, and the more closely we follow his commands, the better. But obedience is not the basis of our relationship with him. It is meant to be an outgrowth and an expression of our relationship with God, not the basis of it.

Jesus then exposes the man's heart, asking him if he is willing to part with his possessions. This request - to sell everything one owns - is not a universal test of readiness to follow Jesus, but rather was a challenge to what this individual held most dear. If he was not ready to give up his wealth, he was not ready to follow Jesus, and (his original question) he was not ready to inherit eternal life. His money and possessions were a spiritual burden, and indeed we all can find the very things we value most to be burdens that impede us from knowing God. Jesus also spoke of this reversal of perspective in Luke 16:15, "what is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight".

Indeed, Jesus says that it is literally impossible for a rich man to be saved - or, by implication, for anyone to be saved who has any kind of treasure in this world. But God can overcome our weakness, our selfishness, and our idolatry. We cannot override our devotion to worldly things simply by obeying commands: this was the "rich ruler's" mistake. It is only by God's grace and love, by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and by the guidance and wisdom that he gives us, that we can be pulled out of the quicksand of worldly attractions and can be enabled to enjoy the spiritual and more lasting rewards that God gives to those who sacrifice their worldly treasures.

The Calling of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

This charming episode is yet another passage unique to Luke's gospel. The hated tax collector acts like a little boy in his eagerness to see the Savior, and is rewarded when Jesus perceives his faith and establishes a relationship with him. In his joy, Zacchaeus proves his sincerity through his generosity and his willingness to right any wrongs he has done in the past. The story forms a striking contrast to the passage we have just studied, and together they call us to examine our own response to Jesus' call.

Jesus met Zacchaeus on a visit to Jericho, one of the world's oldest cities. Just as Jericho even today is the site of disputes between differing ethnic groups, in the biblical era it was also a gateway between different cultures, situated as it was just to the west of the Jordan River. It was also an important trading center, and this made it an especially profitable location for tax collection. As noted numerous times in the gospels, the tax collectors were universally hated by the Jews.

In part, this hatred was because any representative of Roman power was resented, and the Pharisees especially despised those Jews who made themselves willing tools of the Romans. But there was much more to the popular hatred of tax collectors, in that the very basis of the Roman system of taxation was corrupt and unfair. The Romans practiced what is often called "tax farming", in which tax collectors bid for the privilege of collecting taxes in a given area. Then, instead of being paid a salary by the Romans, their profit was the difference between what they could extort from the populace and the quota set by the Romans for their area. The very process thus forced the collectors to be dishonest and oppressive, as the more that they had these qualities, the more income they earned. Zacchaeus, as a chief tax collector, would have had in turn several other tax collectors (such as Matthew or Levi) who had paid him to be allowed to collect taxes in portions of his territory.

Zacchaeus's response to Jesus is all the more noteworthy for the reputation he had, and the wealth he possessed. Like a youth, he climbed up a tree in order to see Jesus, sensing something of great importance in the message this wandering teacher was bringing. The tax collector showed a determination that nothing would prevent him from at least getting a good look at

Jesus, and he also was not afraid to humble himself, and to allow everyone to know just how badly he wanted to see and hear Jesus, in what might be his only chance. Jesus immediately saw not only Zacchaeus's actions, but also his heart, and picked him out from the crowd, requesting to spend time with him. For his part, Zacchaeus willingly offered to make great sacrifices of his material wealth, before Jesus even asked him to prove his sincerity by any such action. This is quite a contrast to the seeker we saw in the previous passage, who was even told that he should sacrifice his wealth to receive the guarantee of eternal life. Zacchaeus is not even told that it would be necessary to sacrifice any of his wealth, but he wanted to do so all the same, as an expression of his joy and as an eager wish to right any wrongs he may have committed. Zacchaeus well exemplifies the faith-based response that Jesus seeks, and of which Luke constantly reminds us in his gospel.

Other Material in Luke 17:1-19:27

Chapter 17 begins with a series of short teachings by Jesus on the inter-related subjects of faith, sin, and responsibility (17:1-10). Most were probably common sayings by Jesus in his lessons, and some are the subject of longer passages in another of the gospels (the reverse of what is usually the case in Luke 10:1-19:27). For example, the teaching on forgiveness in 17:3-4 is similar to the introduction given by Matthew to the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21-35).

For detailed notes on the healing of the ten lepers (17:10-19), see above.

Jesus encountered a great many misconceptions about the nature of the kingdom of God, and 17:20-37 is an extended discussion of some of the basic points Jesus wanted his followers to keep in mind. First of all, he wants them to realize that his kingdom is not a material one, but that it is "within you"; the reign Christ seeks is over our hearts. He goes on further to describe the nature of the kingdom's coming, emphasizing that it comes by God's will and on God's timetable. The passage contains a number of points that sometimes cause confusion - for a detailed discussion, see me or consult the recommended commentaries.

Technical note: The two terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God", as used in the gospels, mean essentially the same thing. The term "kingdom of heaven" is used only by Matthew (31 times), and never appears in Mark or Luke. In fact, Matthew is the only book in the Bible that uses the exact phrase "kingdom of heaven". Matthew uses the term "kingdom of God" only 4 times, whereas both Mark and Luke use it many times. (John does not usually use either term - he does use "kingdom of God" twice.) The three "synoptic" gospels also use other terms (such as "his kingdom" or "my father's kingdom") interchangeably with these two terms, in the many parallel passages in which different writers each use different phrases to refer to this same concept.

In the Parable of the Persistent Widow (18:1-8), Jesus uses a new illustration for a point he has made before, exhorting his followers to pray devotedly and unceasingly. One of the truest tests of our faith is found in whether prayer is an active and vital part of our lives. And one of the best ways to determine this is whether we are able to maintain our commitment to prayer even when it does not produce short-term results. This passage is good to study in connection with Jesus' other teachings about prayer in Luke 11:1-13. This is followed by another prayer-related parable, the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14). Though directed at the Pharisees and their associates, its lesson is a convicting one to believers in any age. God values humility and grace more than we ever realize, as they are at the center of our relationship with him.

One of Jesus' illustrations using children is found in 18:15-17. His call for the little children to come to him echoes a lesson similar to that of the preceding parable. There are, of course, many

qualities in children that Jesus does not wish us to have - but the childlike qualities of humility and of unquestioning faith and affection are vital ones that he wishes us to nurture in our hearts.

For comments on the disappointed seeker (also called "The Rich Ruler", 18:18-30), see above.

After turning away the disappointed seeker, Jesus made one of his occasional predictions of his coming suffering and death (18:31-34). He demanded full obedience and great sacrifice from his followers, but he himself would give up more than he ever asked anyone else to give. When we question God's right to ask us to do his will, we would do well to remember the completeness of Jesus' own sacrifice, suffering, and obedience.

The next three passages take place on Jesus' trip to Jericho. On his way into the city, he heals a blind beggar who was calling out for him (18:35-43). Jesus waits until the man has shown his persistence and his faith, by not giving up even when reproved by the crowd. Jesus then entered Jericho, where he met Zacchaeus (19:1-10) - see above for notes on this passage. While still in Zacchaeus's presence, Jesus told his Parable of the Ten Minas (19:11-27). This parable is often considered as a parallel to the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30, but while similar in some respects, there are also key differences. A mina, though valuable, was less money than a talent. The context is also somewhat different, and Jesus' preamble to the minas also referred explicitly to King Herod's trip to Rome to secure his throne, an event with which many were familiar.

With the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:28-44), Luke once again links up with the main story line of the other gospels. We'll resume there next week with "The Last Days of Jesus".

- *Mark W. Garner, November 2000*

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**THIS IS MY SON:
LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE**

Notes For Lesson Nine: The Last Days of Jesus (Luke 19:28-21:38)

The last week of Jesus' life began with a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, with the crowd praising and honoring him, but it ended with crucifixion, the crowd demanding his death. The study of this chain of events is one that not only deepens our faith in Jesus and our appreciation of Jesus, it also challenges our faith and our response to him. Even believers too often have a fragile allegiance to Jesus, and can be as fickle as the crowd in Jerusalem.

The Triumphal Entry (Luke 19:28-44)

As Jesus entered Jerusalem in what would be the last week of his life, he was received as a conquering hero, as one coming to claim his kingdom. But Jesus already knew that, within a few short days, popular opinion would turn sharply against him. When we study the joyful crowd in these verses, knowing that soon the crowd will turn against Jesus, it is a penetrating challenge to the kind of shallow faith that is all too prevalent, in any age, among those who call themselves believers.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, a path is prepared for him by an enthusiastic populace (verses 28-36). A colt is secured for Jesus to ride upon, many persons spread their cloaks on the road ahead of him, and (as noted in other gospels' accounts*) others spread palm branches in his path, as for a king. They are acknowledging and accepting him as their king, the chosen one who will rescue them. And indeed Jesus wanted to be their Lord, and to save them, but not in the way they expected.

* We shall refer freely to some of the details of the "triumphal entry" that Luke does not mention, but which are mentioned in one or more of the other gospel accounts. For parallel study, see Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, and John 12:12-19. As with any event that is covered in more than one account, there should be no surprise that different details are mentioned by different writers, as long as nothing is mutually exclusive. A complete account, with full details, of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem - or indeed almost any other significant even in his life - would take many thousands of words. None of the gospel writers purport to give us anything like a complete, detailed biography of Jesus, but rather intend to give us a convincing panorama of the reasons why we ought to put our faith in him and respond to the call to follow him.

While the crowd, at least for now, sings and rejoices in Jesus' arrival, thinking that the time has come for all their dreams to be fulfilled, the Pharisees and many of the Jewish leaders found their hearts filled with fear even greater than before. Regardless of what they did nor did not understand about the Messiah and his mission, they were jealous of the attention that Jesus was receiving, they were frightened and resentful that the crowd so easily gave its allegiance to him, and they were fearful and angry that the Jews, in their excitement over Jesus, were abandoning the rules and guidelines that the Pharisees had laid down for them, and which were usually followed without question. In all, the Pharisees and Jewish leaders were faced with losing the control that they loved so much, and which they were so accustomed to having.

There is an obvious, and unfortunate contrast, between the depth of the opposition to Jesus and the depth of the popular support for him. The people's faith in Jesus, and their joy in his arrival, were certainly exuberant, and probably even sincere, but their feelings were incredibly superficial. Their allegiance to him was not based on a genuine awareness of who he was, or even on any of the wonderful things he had done and taught, but primarily on the things they hoped he would do for them, according to their desires and will. When it became clear that he would not meet their fleshly expectations, they turned against him. On the other hand, the

opposition of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Jewish leaders was determined, implacable, and coldly calculating. They did not allow anything to interfere with their hard-hearted attempts to destroy Jesus.

Jesus knew this, and he knew that in a few days things would be much different. The tragedy of Jerusalem's future was on his heart. He foresaw the crucifixion, and also the final spiritual battle of the Jews, as they decided to accept or reject their Messiah, and he knew also that the destruction of the city itself was not far off. Jesus saw not the temporary, superficial, reality, but the hidden truths in human hearts, and the ways these truths would come out and would influence future events.

There is a most sobering lesson for today's Christians in seeing the swings of emotions in the crowds of Jerusalem during the last days of Jesus' human life. A shallow commitment is quickly abandoned, and if those who were privileged to live in the days when the Son of God actually walked the earth were nevertheless too weak in their faith to remain committed to him, how much easier it is now for a believer to abandon Jesus in times of testing, if that believer's faith was based only on superficial things such as emotion, habit, or selfish expectations. And even an apparent exuberance means nothing as far as an individual's real faith in God. Few Christians worship Christ today with the lavish display of joy shown in this passage, but few fall away from Christ as easily as those apparently enthusiastic believers did. Enthusiasm is good, but excitement is not the same thing as commitment.

Final Confrontations (Luke 19:45-20:47)

The series of teachings and dialogues in these verses are worthy of careful attention for several reasons. First, these incidents illustrate for us the differences between Jesus' perspectives and those of most of the humans who knew him and heard him. Then also, they show us Jesus' persistence in teaching and living by the truth, not adapting his life and doctrine to the whims of popular opinion. Finally, this chain of events explains for us why so many persons turned against Jesus in such a short period of time, transforming the crowd that joyfully celebrated his arrival in Jerusalem into a mindless and vindictive mob demanding his death. Running through this whole sequence of discussions and events is the theme of perspective. The conflict between the spiritual viewpoint of Jesus and the fleshly, false "religious" viewpoint of most humans is revealed to have many facets.

The confrontation in the Temple (19:45-48) illustrates a most basic difference. Jesus considered the temple to be properly a site of prayer, of worship, of growing closer to God. He thus considered it inappropriate, and offensive, to find commercial and business activities taking place there, even if they were centered around providing the sacrifices used in the temple ceremonies. Most of the Jews had their focus on the outward acts of worship, considering that the important thing was to fulfill a checklist of outward activities, and hence they saw nothing wrong with the selling and money changing that took place in the temple area.

The next clash concerned the source of authority (20:1-8). Questioned by some of the Jewish leaders as to what gave him the authority to act and teach in such a bold manner, Jesus does not answer, but has a question of his own. In asking whether John's teaching came from men or from God, Jesus not only demonstrated a tactical cleverness, putting them in a "no-win" situation, he also exposed one of their most serious spiritual misunderstandings. They had long ago lost any real sense of God's personal authority or reign, in the complex they had built up of human rules and of precedents based on arbitrary human authority. That meant that not only could they not answer Jesus' question, they also could not respond to the spiritual challenge that Jesus posed to them. The Parable of the Tenants (20:9-19) was an even more direct challenge to

the Jewish leaders. Its implication, that God would turn away from those of his people who had hardened themselves to his prophets and his Son, was both obvious and provocative. In fact, hearing this parable may have been the decisive offense in the eyes of many of the Jews, for at this point they determined to seize him as soon as they could do so without risking a backlash.

Jesus' teaching on Caesar and God (20:20-26) is not only another example of his brilliant and penetrating dissection of a tricky question, it also makes a point we would do well to ponder in our own relationship with God. The question of whether to pay taxes to the Romans was the source of bitter controversy among the Jews, and the source of endless debates. Jesus cut to the heart of the matter, tossing aside most of the "points" ordinarily made on both sides of the issue, and at the same time challenged once more the fleshly perspective of those who consumed themselves with such controversies rather than seeking better to understand God's ways and will.

Similarly, when the Sadducees (see note at top of next page) questioned Jesus on the resurrection (20:27-40) with one of their favorite questions - one similar to the ludicrous debating tricks often used by atheists today - Jesus again not only easily handled their question, but in so doing exposed the misconception behind the question and behind their other erroneous beliefs about God.

Like the Pharisees, the party of the Sadducees arose during the days of Greek rule. But unlike the Pharisees, who sought to maintain a strict distance and separation between themselves and their Greek overlords, the Sadducees deliberately sought ways to please the secular rulers, rationalizing this with the age-old lie that pleasing worldly leaders would allow them to gain more influence. The Sadducees attracted those Jews eager for wealth or political influence, and in the days of Jesus many leaders, and many of the priests, were Sadducees. But they never attracted a popular following to the extent that the Pharisees were able to do.

Jesus finally put an end to this series of dialogues with another question of his own. Quoting Psalm 110, in which David addresses his "Lord", he challenges the teachers to interpret this passage consistently with their beliefs about Jesus and about the Messiah in general. More than a debating trick, Jesus was using this question to expose their deeper inability to understand the Messiah, or to understand God's plans in general. After this, Jesus concluded with a firm denunciation of the teachers of the law and the fleshly ways that they falsely claimed to serve God.

Final Teachings (Luke 21:1-37)

We shall not have time to cover this section in detail, but only to note the most important overall points that Jesus is making in these lessons. The first few verses, telling of the offering made by a poor widow, are easy to study, but the rest of this chapter requires careful study to understand in all its details. Following is a mere overview; for more, consult the recommended commentaries or see me. (I would encourage you first to see what you can understand on your own.)

Jesus' comments on the widow's offering (verses 1-4) form the straightforward prelude to the more complex teachings in the rest of chapter 21, but they are also worthy of consideration in their own right. Jesus teaches another valuable lesson on perspective, namely that it is not the amount of a gift in absolute terms that makes it a sacrifice, but rather its worth in relative terms. A sum of money that would not have merited a glance from a rich Sadducee was a tremendous sacrifice for this widow, and thus was a more genuine gift than the much greater sums of money given by others.

As they were conversing in the temple area, the attention of the disciples was drawn to the splendor and strength of the temple. The temple standing in Jesus' time was the refurbishing that

had been directed by Herod the Great, not long before Jesus' birth, and it was indeed a magnificent building. Herod had spared no expense, knowing that the project was one of the few ways he could gain favor with the Jews. But the strength and stability of the temple were deceptive, as Jesus explains in his predictions of upheaval (verses 5-33).

While many readers jump to the conclusion that Jesus is talking about the end of the world, most of Jesus' discourse in these verses refers specifically to the coming destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Shortly before that year, the Romans grew tired of dealing with the endless rebellions and debates arising from the Jews, and decided to besiege and destroy Jerusalem. God also allowed this as an emphatic indication that the old, obsolete covenant had now been superseded by the blood sacrifice of Christ. The destruction of Jerusalem brought the permanent end of the Levitical sacrificial system, which after centuries of use had now fulfilled its purpose, and was no longer needed. Some of the images of turmoil and destruction are literal references to the situation in AD 70 (e.g. verse 20, describing the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem when they besieged it, called 'the abomination that causes desolation' in Matthew's account), while others are common symbols of distress and judgment that were often used by the prophets. Then too, Jesus does hint broadly at the ultimate end of our physical world.

Jesus details some important practical implications in verses 34-38. Rather than indulge in flesh-pleasing speculations about the end of the world, our consciousness of how quickly God can descend upon his world in judgment should persuade us to live godly lives free from sensual indulgences and worldly temptations. As Peter says, "Since everything is to be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to lead holy and godly lives" (2 Peter 3:11). We ought always to live in the awareness that this earth is not our permanent home, nor is it the ultimate resting place of anyone we meet.

- *Mark W. Garner, November 2000*

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**THIS IS MY SON:
LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE**

Notes For Lesson Ten: The Sacrifice (Luke 22:1-23:49)

The time now came for Jesus to offer his body as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He was betrayed by a friend, he said agonizing good-byes to those he loved but who still could not understand what he was doing, he was humiliated like a common criminal, he was tortured, and finally he was brutally and painfully executed. The sacrifice had to be this thorough, to make complete the forgiveness it brought. Our goal in studying the betrayal, suffering, and death of Jesus is to come away with a deeper appreciation of what it took to bring grace to us.

Jesus' Last Hours With the Twelve (Luke 22:1-46)

Jesus spent the last few hours before his arrest with the small group with whom he had been the closest. He had taught and given everything he could to them, but now that he would face the great sufferings that lie ahead, one of them was busy betraying him, and the rest could not grasp the meaning of what was about to happen, and indeed could not even stay awake with him as he prayed. We all know how difficult it is when we need encouragement and strength, and find instead that even our closest friends cannot understand the burden we are carrying. Jesus carried a burden on this night that no human could grasp, and he had to carry it largely by himself.

We are told that the agonies Jesus was about to undergo occurred because Judas Iscariot had betrayed Jesus to those who sought his life (verses 1-6). The Pharisees and other Jewish leaders had long sought to destroy Jesus, and were deterred only by the fear of a popular backlash. The offer of betrayal by one of Jesus' trusted disciples was a marvelous opportunity in their eyes, and one not to be passed up. In judging Judas, let us also remember our own weakness. Satan would love to get any one of us back in his fold, and offers us many opportunities to betray Jesus. And it is the sad truth that many believers jump at the glittering garbage that Satan dangles in front of them, and give up spiritual treasure to acquire material wealth, popularity, or worldly fame. As Judas found out (see Matthew 27:3-10 and Acts 1:15-19), this is a bad bargain. We should instead remember examples like Moses, who "regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward" (Hebrews 11:26).

With Judas having already having made his wretched agreement, Jesus met one last time with his beloved disciples at what we usually call The Last Supper (verses 7-38). In addition to sharing one last Passover meal with them, Jesus made a memorable gesture for them to practice in the future, by passing the bread and cup for them to share, in anticipation of his coming sacrifice. Though this became the basis for the vital weekly ceremony of the Lord's Supper, at the time it was barely understood by the Twelve, as was his warning about Judas's betrayal of him. Indeed, not long afterwards a dispute about "greatness" arose, which Jesus had to defuse by calling them to re-examine their entire attitudes as to what it meant to be "great". Only after the upheavals of the cross, the empty tomb, and the ascension would they finally begin to grasp what spiritual greatness was, and only then could they abandon their dreams of worldly greatness for more lasting goals.

Jesus also did what he could to prepare them for the future. At the supper, he tried to re-adjust their perspectives and leave them visible reminders of his sacrifice. He also warned Peter of Satan's coming attack on his loyalty to Jesus, but Peter again cannot see the implications clearly. Knowing how dimly his dearest friends understood him, Jesus also prayed earnestly (verses 39-46) for himself and for them (as John tells us in John 17), and exhorts them also to pray for

themselves and the temptations soon to come upon them. What must it be like for Jesus also to see in advance the ways we shall be tested, and to know that our weakness is so great that we shall often fall?

Jesus Arrested & Tried (Luke 22:47-23:25)

Now began the long, agonizing series of sufferings that Jesus had to undergo to make himself the Savior of the world and the sacrifice for our sins. Our view in class will merely be a panoramic one, and it is a good idea to take the time on a regular basis to read and meditate on each of these things that Jesus had to endure. Remember always that these things happened for a reason: Jesus underwent all of this as part of making himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

It is particularly significant to note that, since Jesus is taking on the burden of guilt for the sins of the world, and enduring the punishment due to each human for his or her sins, the sufferings Jesus underwent were torments that would be appropriate as punishment for sin. Sin is by its nature a rebellion against God, it is inherently selfish, self-centered, and self-exalting, and it is an ignorant and stupid decision to follow the way of darkness, death and destruction rather than walking in the light, life, and peace of God. It is therefore appropriate for the sinner to suffer condemnation as a criminal for rebelling against the ruler of the universe, to undergo reprobation and humiliation at the hands of the rest of humanity, whom the sinner has implicitly degraded and offended, and to experience execution for deliberately choosing death over life.

One difference between the innocently sacrificed Jesus, and a justly condemned criminal, is that Jesus made clear even in death that he still reigned. Even in apparent defeat, at his betrayal and arrest (22:47-53), he was the only one who retains his self-control and his spiritual perspective. Judas has given his heart to the devil, and his body and mind to deceit and treachery. The loyal disciples alternate between fear and useless (though dramatic) gestures. The goons sent to arrest Jesus are not even sure how to act, now that the time has come. But Jesus still "knows where he came from and where he is going".

In the turmoil following the arrest, Peter denied and disowned Jesus (22:54-62), just as Jesus predicted. This was a bitter defeat for Peter, but it would prove a valuable lesson. We also deny Jesus, by implication, whenever we choose to live in a way that makes our loyalty to him ambiguous to the pagans around us. But we also can and should learn from our mistakes, as did Peter. Of a different nature was the mocking and beating that Jesus endured (22:63-65). While perhaps less emotionally damaging than the defection and disloyalty of his friends, the cruel abuses to which he was subjected took a horrible toll on his body.

After these preliminary ordeals, Jesus was put on trial by the Roman prefect (or procurator, an office similar to governor), Pontius Pilate (22:66-23:7). Pilate was a bitter, selfish figure, loathed by the Jews and often viewed unfavorably by his Roman superiors. In his ten years as prefect of Judea (AD 26-36), Pilate showed a lasting contempt for the Jews*. The prefect normally lived in Caesarea, but came to Jerusalem on occasions such as the Passover, when a strong Roman presence was important in preventing disturbances. But at first, Pilate is, if anything, fairly objective at this stage of the proceedings, and indeed he at first did what he could to set Jesus free. Then, seizing on the fact that Jesus came from Galilee, King Herod's dominion, he sent him to Herod.

*On at least two occasions, Pilate had provoked near-riots by deliberately offending the Jews and scorning their law, most recently by confiscating funds from the temple treasury to build an aqueduct. A few years after the crucifixion, he arbitrarily and unjustly executed some Samaritans, and was removed from his post by the Romans.

The Herod mentioned here was Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great. Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea from his father's death until AD 39.* He was not normally in Jerusalem, but like so many others, had come for the Passover. His interest in Jesus (23:8-12) was strictly a matter of curiosity, and both he and Pilate seemed somewhat disappointed that Jesus did not live up to his miracle-worker reputation. Herod's mocking treatment of Jesus seems even to have repaired an earlier rift with Pilate, as the two men established a friendship based on their shared role in trying Jesus (and, no doubt, in their implied mockery of the Jews as a whole).

* When Herod the Great died in 4 BC, shortly after Jesus' birth, his kingdom was divided up among his sons, who were allowed local power, with the Romans overseeing the entire area. Archelaus, another son of Herod the Great, was awarded Jerusalem and Judea, but he was so violent and incompetent that in AD 6 the Romans removed him and brought that area directly under Roman authority. Herod Antipas was a somewhat more capable ruler - although it was he who executed John the Baptist - and the Romans generally left him alone.

When Jesus was then returned to Pilate, the crowd stepped up its attacks, and eventually Pilate gave in and ordered crucifixion (23:13-25). The crowd willingly accepted the responsibility for Jesus' death, showing their determination to see him killed by preferring the release of a notorious reprobate to the release of Jesus. They also frightened Pilate with their claim that releasing Jesus would be an act of disloyalty to Rome (see John 19:12-16). The implied threat - that Pilate's "treason" might be discovered by the emperor - would probably have terrified the weak governor, because the emperor of the time, Tiberius Caesar, was notorious for his paranoia, and his impulsive punishments of Roman officials accused even unjustly of disloyalty or treachery. And so, through lies, intimidation, and threats of violence, the mob got its way, and Jesus was sentenced to death.

The Crucifixion (Luke 23:26-49)

After all of the other agonies Jesus endured came the crucifixion itself. The Romans had perfected this ancient means of executing criminals into one of the most painful and humiliating methods possible. The sacrifice of Jesus was completed, with him occupying the place and enduring the punishment that were meant for the most sordid criminals. The complete humiliation, the separation from God and humanity, and the extreme physical suffering, all constituted the last part of the proxy payment for humankind's massive pile of sins.

As was the custom, Jesus was ordered to carry his cross to the place of execution, but in his weakness he cannot do so, and another man is forced to carry it for him (verse 26). This is a demonstration that, even before his execution, Jesus endured extensive physical suffering, well beyond what would normally have been accorded even a base criminal. And yet, with clear spiritual vision, he tells the crowd not to mourn for him, but for themselves and their people. He implies that the judgment being meted out to him is the precursor of a more drastic judgment to come.

Note that these women who were following Jesus and mourning for him may have been sincerely demonstrating their affection for him, and their chagrin over his condemnation, but it may be even more likely that they were the kind of quasi-professional mourners who often appeared at Jewish deathbeds and funerals, merely to fulfill a ceremonial appearance of sorrow. Jesus' comments to these women have the same basic meaning in either case.

Jesus was not crucified alone. Two criminals, whose time had also come, were crucified with him (verses 32-33). And as Matthew tells us (27:44), they literally added insult to injury by verbally abusing and insulting Jesus as they themselves neared death. The crowd added its own dose of humiliation and abuse (verses 34-38), in a frightening turnaround from their joyful celebration of Jesus' arrival only a few days before. They mock Jesus' claims of divinity, and taunt him with his apparent helplessness, tempting him to rescue himself. Their abuse is so harsh, and so unwarranted, that one of the two miscreants dying with him suddenly changes his

heart, and repents of his own earlier abuse towards Jesus (verses 39-43). Jesus promises the penitent criminal that he will soon join him in paradise - a poignant moment showing that even in death Jesus held the precious power to bring salvation and life.

Within a few hours, the sacrifice was completed (verses 44-49). Some of the other gospels furnish more details about the very end than does Luke, who focuses primarily on the accompanying signs that an event of crucial spiritual significance has taken place. The sudden mid-day darkness*, the rending of the temple curtain, and other signs pointed the discerning to this conclusion. Some honest observers, such as the Roman centurion at the scene, could sense this, even if most others would not realize the full significance of Jesus' crucifixion until much later.

* Note that this darkness, contrary to the speculations of certain liberal commentators, could not have been a solar eclipse. Expositors as early as the second century AD had occasion to combat this false explanation of the astonishing fact (well-known at the time) that three hours of darkness had come without warning on the day of Jesus' execution. A solar eclipse can only occur at a new moon, and the crucifixion took place on the Passover weekend, when (by the ancient Jewish calendar) it is not possible to have a new moon.

The crucifixion was an apparently crushing defeat for Jesus and those who loved him, but all along Jesus foreknew what would happen next. Our study will conclude next week with a look at the resurrection of Jesus, the event that proved once for all the truth of Jesus' divinity and of the validity of his sacrificial ministry.

- *Mark W. Garner, November 2000*

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THIS IS MESSIAH:
LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

Notes For Lesson Eleven: The Resurrection (Luke 23:50-24:53)

The crucifixion was considered, by all but a discerning few, to be the final defeat of Jesus. But then Jesus rose from the dead, just as he had said he would, in order to prove his divinity, to restore hope and purpose to his followers, and to begin the process by which the gospel message of salvation would be taken into the whole world.

Burial & Resurrection (Luke 23:50-24:12)

After the crucifixion (and after the soldiers had verified that Jesus was dead, as recounted in John), Jesus' body was buried by Joseph of Arimathea, one of the few prominent Jews who had not stood opposed to Jesus. Several faithful women prepared burial spices for his body, and waited until after the Passover (following the law) to take the spices to the tomb. When they came to the tomb on the day after the Sabbath - that is, the first day of the week, or "Sunday" - to their surprise they found that Jesus had risen from the dead.

The gospel descriptions of the burial of Jesus (23:50-56) leave no doubt that his most devoted followers were certain that he was actually dead. Joseph and the women carefully follow the Jewish customs designed to honor the dead. Likewise, Matthew records the extensive precautions taken by Pilate and the Jewish leaders (Matthew 27:62-66) to make sure that the disciples did not stage a phony "resurrection" by taking the body. If anything, these enemies of Jesus remembered more clearly his promise to rise than did Jesus' own followers, so they closed the tomb with a huge stone, gave it the imperial seal, and posted a large guard. It was therefore not possible for Jesus or his followers to create the appearance of a "resurrection" by means of some kind of trick.

That Jesus did frequently predict his resurrection is clear from the gospels. In Luke, these predictions occur in Luke 9:22 and 18:31-34, and there are three such references in Matthew. And it is most likely that these were exemplary of a larger number of other occasions on which Jesus made similar statements. On some of these occasions, his disciples did not fully understand what he was saying, responding primarily to the mention of his early death, predicted as a precursor to the resurrection itself. And yet, as seen most clearly in Matthew's account, there was a widespread awareness that Jesus had made such claims, whether they were taken seriously or not. And without question it was after the resurrection that the disciples overcame their doubt and discouragement, not to mention their lack of spiritual discernment, and soon became bold, effective gospel preachers.

It is worthwhile to reconstruct for ourselves the basic situation, in view of what happened next. Any public figure who had made such bold and outlandish claims would naturally find his body and burial the subject of intense interest. There was no easier way for the Romans or the Jewish leaders to silence the Christians than by providing proof of Jesus' dead body, but they could not do so. (The evidences-related aspects of the resurrection were discussed completely in the recent Christian Evidences class, "Faith in the Living God" - see those notes for more.)

The finding of the empty tomb, first discovered by the women as they brought their spices, is described in Luke 24:1-12. Once again, we find additional details in the other gospel accounts*, which round out a fascinating picture. The astounding evidence at the tomb caused both fear and

joy, sometimes in the same persons. The angels at the tomb re-assure the frightened women by reminding them that Jesus had foretold this, and "then they remembered his words" and went to share their joyful discovery with the apostles. The apostles were initially skeptical, thinking that the report was nonsensical. But Peter, running to the tomb, saw the evidence for himself and began to ponder over what had occurred.

* The variations in the gospel accounts of the resurrection are a favorite hobby-horse of atheists and other pseudo-intellectual commentators, whose lack of understanding, perception, and objectivity causes them to see this as a "contradiction". We have discussed in previous notes the reasonability of different writers reporting different details, just as would happen in any news story that is covered by numerous reporters, especially if they were writing to different audiences. To give just one example, Luke does not mention anything about the guards at the tomb, whereas Matthew mentions them extensively, telling us why they were there, how they reacted when Jesus rose, and what they did afterwards. This is because Matthew, unlike Luke, wrote to a Jewish audience, many of whom had heard the phony story (Matthew 28:13-15) circulated by the Jewish leaders in an attempt to cover up the resurrection, and he thus needed to explain fully the role of these guards, to combat it.

Jesus Appears to the Travelers (Luke 24:13-35)

Luke is the only one of the gospel writers who recounts this fascinating account of the risen Jesus appearing to the two travelers on the road to Emmaus. Their slow realization of Jesus' identity, and their delayed appreciation of his purpose, not only mirror the general reaction of many of those who knew or saw Jesus personally, but also serve as a parallel to the experience that so many believers have in every era, in the ways that we must overcome our fleshly unbelief, discouragement, and worldly expectations in order to see Jesus clearly.

While Peter and the other ten faithful apostles were marveling about the empty tomb, Jesus himself was appearing to two oblivious travelers on their way to a town outside of Jerusalem (verses 13-18). Not only did they not recognize Jesus, but like most others they had only a very rudimentary awareness of Jesus' ministry and of the significance of his death. Jesus feigns a lack of knowledge of the controversial crucifixion of the "king of the Jews", in order to see what they have to say. Ironically, the conversation begins with the travelers assuming that it is Jesus who needs to be instructed, but he quickly turns things around and enlightens them.

The travelers have all the facts at their disposal (verses 19-24) - they know of Jesus' ministry, life, and death, and they have heard the report of the empty tomb. And they even say that their hope for Jesus had been that he "was going to redeem Israel" - as indeed he did! But they have knowledge without understanding: they cannot quite see things from a spiritual viewpoint, and cannot quite grasp what Jesus was all about, even though they lack none of the information to do so. Likewise, believers today can have full factual knowledge of the ministry of Jesus, and can recite the correct doctrines of sin, forgiveness, and salvation, and yet fail to have hearts that are deeply affected by spiritual truths. There are times when we need to step aside from pursuing further facts, and instead strive to see the facts we already know from a more spiritual, eternal, and godly perspective.

Jesus therefore leads them into a gradual realization of what has actually happened (verses 25-32). The Scriptures (*i.e.* Old Testament), which they had studied all of their lives, explained what the Messiah would do when he came, and yet they had never really grasped this. They were lost in speculation and uncertainty, because they had been looking at things from a misguided perspective. But they had receptive hearts, and soon Jesus brought them to an appreciation of who he was and of what had happened. Their "burning hearts" both teach them and testify to their faith.

Jesus Appears to the Eleven (Luke 24:33-53)

Now the eleven apostles are again told that Jesus has risen, and soon afterwards Jesus at last appears to them as a group. He calms their fears and uncertainties, then reminds them that everything that has happened to him was necessary, and indeed it had all been foretold. Jesus' own earthly ministry was then concluded, and it was time for them to begin their own ministry, as witnesses to the gospel.

After Jesus had conversed with the two travelers, he disappeared from them, and they at once walked several miles back to Jerusalem to seek out the apostles (verses 33-35). The apostles themselves had been discussing Peter's report of the empty tomb, and the two groups were thus able to encourage each other with the truth of the resurrection. As they became thoroughly convinced of the truth of Jesus' return to life, they rejoiced.

Then Jesus himself appears and provides them all with tangible proofs that he is once again alive (verses 36-43). Despite their earlier joy at hearing the news, they are at first afraid. Jesus allows them to examine him and touch him, and he eats solid food as an additional proof that he is alive. These actions were significant in demonstrating conclusively that he was not a "ghost" or a spirit, but a real person raised to life. We ourselves have not been privileged to see and touch the risen Savior, but we do have such eyewitness accounts to encourage us. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29); "though you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9).

Having convinced them that he is alive, Jesus then begins to explain the truth to them, as he had done earlier to the travelers (Luke 24:44-49). Luke says that Jesus "opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures", and at last they began to see clearly, not only Jesus, but their own ministry. For now it was time for their ministry to begin. They would become witnesses to the world of the things that they had seen and heard. Jesus directed them to remain in Jerusalem for a short while, because soon the time would come for them to begin the task of preaching the gospel to a lost world. Luke, of course, begins the book of Acts with a summary of this same discussion.

Luke closes his gospel account with the ascension (verses 50-53). This is also included again in Acts, yet it is fitting for him to end his narrative of the Savior of the world in this way. It brings the gospel story full circle, with Jesus returning to heaven, just as he had entered the world from heaven at the beginning. Luke calls for us to strengthen our faith by remembering Jesus' divinity, proven in this and so many other ways. And Jesus' final withdrawal re-emphasizes to his followers that they now have new responsibilities. A response in faith is thus called for - not only from these eleven disciples, but also from all who hear and believe the gospel.

- *Mark W. Garner, November 2000*

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