

STUDY OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

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I. Introduction

- A. To better understand any of the gospels, indeed any book of the Bible, we need to know something about the author and his background, as well as the times and context into which he wrote. It also helps to understand the purpose for which he wrote. For example, John was explicit in his gospel by stating his purpose was “that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

- B. Luke is equally explicit in stating his purpose. In Luke 1:1-4, he states that he has investigated everything concerning Jesus’ life and has set out to write “an orderly account.” Keep in mind that Luke’s orderly account is not only of the life and ministry of Jesus during his earthly life, death, and resurrection, but also of the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which he describes in the book of Acts, of which he is also the author, the only Gentile author in the New Testament.

- C. Because their purposes are somewhat different, the gospels of Luke and John are quite different, although compatible. For example, Luke records more parables of Jesus than any other gospel writer, whereas John records none. John does not address Jesus’ birth or events of his youth, whereas Luke beautifully describes not only Jesus’ birth, but also the birth of his cousin, John the Baptist, to an elderly priest who doubted the angel's message that he and his wife would have a son in their old age.

II. Who was Luke?

- A. We know that Luke was a companion of Paul, and that he was a physician. How Luke came to be a companion and co-worker with Paul is an interesting story. In

Acts 16:7 we learn that Paul and his companions (which did not include Luke) had been traveling through the region of Phrygia and Galatia. Paul decided he wanted to go east from there into Asia; however, Luke 16:6 says the Holy Spirit forbade him. Next, he decided to head to Bithynia, but again the Spirit said *no*. So, they went to a town called Troas. While there, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading for him to come to Macedonia and help them. What is interesting about this—and very easy to miss—is that the Holy Spirit had led Paul to the town of Troas where he had his vision, but where he also met Luke. When Paul is ready to leave Troas to go to Macedonia, Acts 16:11 says “*We set sail from Troas.*” Thus, the Holy Spirit had specifically narrowed Paul’s destinations to lead him to Troas where he met Luke and included him in his small band of disciples. Luke is the only one who would be with Paul for the rest of his life. In II Timothy 4:11 Paul writes from prison in Rome that “only Luke is with me.” The remainder of Acts, beginning with chapter 16:11, is told from the first-person perspective by Luke.

- B. We know that Luke was not an eyewitness of the events he describes in his gospel. In Luke 1:1-3 he states that he has investigated everything, spoken to eyewitnesses, and determined to write an “orderly account.” As part of this endeavor, he had to decide whose accounts, or portions of accounts, he would rely upon most heavily in writing his gospel. Perhaps his choices were influenced by the teaching he heard while a companion of Paul, although it is commonly believed by biblical experts that he also used the Gospel of Mark as one of his sources.

- C. Another interesting tidbit about Luke arises from the fact he was a physician. Because he was a physician, he provides more medical detail in the miracles of Jesus than is found in the other gospels. In the Roman world there were far more slaves than free people, and most professions, including physicians, were populated heavily by slaves. In fact, there were so many slaves in the medical profession at the end of the first century that the emperor Domitian issued a decree that forbade any more slaves becoming physicians. Many of the most respected Roman doctors were slaves. Thus, Luke may well have been a slave at one time, although we cannot be positive. The fact that Luke’s gospel shows more

concern for the poor and marginalized in society than any other gospel, however, supports the idea he was a slave himself.

D. As mentioned, Luke was a Gentile, and the only Gentile author of any book of the New Testament. Paul's ministry was primarily to the Gentiles, and we find in Luke's writing a sensitivity to Gentiles that is not found, for example, in Matthew. Also, due to his working closely with Paul, he approaches some groups, such as the Pharisees, somewhat differently than the other gospel writers do. For example, only in Luke does Jesus share meal fellowship with the Pharisees on three occasions (Lk 7:36, 11:37, and 14:1). Only Luke points out that the Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod plans to take his life (Lk 13:31). Luke's gospel does not implicate the Pharisees in the plot to crucify Jesus to the degree other gospels do. In short, he has a broader perspective on the Pharisees, as well as on Gentiles.

E. Themes in Luke

1. Amazement. As we go through Luke, we will find that almost everyone who encountered Jesus was amazed by him—Zechariah's friends, the shepherds, Joseph and Mary, people in Nazareth, his hometown, those in Capernaum, those who heard the boy Jesus in the Temple, those who observed the miracles. Even the Pharisees and others who opposed Jesus were nevertheless amazed by him. Keep in mind, Luke interviewed people about these events 30 years or so later, and they still were amazed. We would be, too, if we had been present for these events. In our study we should use our imagination to place ourselves at these events and become amazed ourselves as we study Luke's gospel.
2. Those who should didn't get it, and those who shouldn't did. One of the patterns we will discover as we go through Luke is that time after time religious leaders—those who should have been the most spiritual and the

first to understand Jesus' message and ministry, simply didn't get it. On the other hand, ordinary people—often women or other marginalized people, were able to immediately grasp the gift of grace that Jesus was offering them. A few examples: **i)** Zechariah (the father of John the Baptist and a priest) doubted the message of the angel who said his wife would have a child in her old age; he asked for a sign; Mary, on the other hand, when told she would bear a son although not married, said, "Let it be with me according to your word." **ii)** The religious leaders and the thief and soldier. In Luke 23 the religious leaders mocked Jesus on the cross, while the thief and the Roman soldier recognized Jesus as the Son of God. **iii)** We find this pattern in the parables also. The parable of the Good Samaritan, the parable of the Prodigal Son, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. In each of these the one who should have understood didn't, but the one who shouldn't understand, did.

3. The parables at work. Luke delves into Jesus' parables more than any other gospel writer. He both recounts more of them, and provides more details and context, even pointing out at times *why* Jesus was telling a particular parable. He expertly draws us into the stories to identify with one or more of the characters. And who we identify with tells us a lot about who *we* are. But Jesus usually leaves off the moral summing up at the end of the parable, leaving it to us to glean the message on our own. We have to find the "aha moment" ourselves, guided however by the Holy Spirit. We will seek to find these aha moments together as we study the parables.
4. Hesed. Hesed is a Hebrew word found often in the Old Testament. When a comparable thought is presented in the New Testament it is usually translated *grace* or *mercy*. What it means is *When the person from whom I have a right to expect nothing gives me everything*. Think of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The wounded man had every right to expect something from the priest or Levite because they were fellow Jews, but no right to expect anything from the Samaritan. Yet it was the Samaritan who showed him mercy and showered him with aid and concern. The wounded man received everything from the very person from whom he had no right to expect anything at all. This, of course, is how God treats us, and we will see this theme throughout Luke.

5. The Long Journey. Although it is easy to overlook this, the largest literary block of Luke's gospel is a journey—Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem. It begins at Luke 9:51 when Jesus "determined to journey to Jerusalem," and it ends at Luke 19:44 when he arrives at last—which is about 40 percent of the book. What we find from the structure of Luke is that the final journey does not begin until the question "Who is Jesus" is finally answered by the transfiguration and the confession of Peter. As part of our study, we will be on the road with Jesus as his teaching becomes more concentrated, and there is a sense of urgency about all he must accomplish before going to the cross.
6. Luke as a Bridge. In some ways, the Gospel of Luke is a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. As it begins, Zechariah—the father to be of John the Baptist—is a Jewish priest fully living in Old Testament times, living under the law. The transition from the old covenant—living under the law, and with temple worship focusing on animal sacrifice—to New Testament concepts of salvation by grace and Holy Communion is described in Luke and in Acts. It was a revolutionary time in the history of the world, although many did not recognize it as such at the time. But the events chronicled in Luke (and in Acts) changed the entire world. We need to keep this in mind as we make our way through this exciting gospel.

III. Luke 1:1-4 Dedication to Theophilus

- A. The gospel begins with an address to Theophilus, setting forth why Luke was writing and explaining that he has investigated the matter thoroughly. Luke also says he wants Theophilus to know the truth about which he had already been instructed, which indicates the recipient had already been informed to some extent about Jesus.
- B. So, the question is: who is Theophilus? The short answer is we don't know. Scholars have come up with various theories but are unable to confirm any of

them with certainty. They are: 1) He was a Roman government official. This theory is bolstered by the fact he is addressed as “most excellent Theophilus,” (some translations say “most Honorable”)—a title for certain magistrates or other Roman officials. If this is so, this gospel and the book of Acts may have been written in defense of Paul who in Acts was arrested by the Romans, tried, and then he appealed to Rome. It also helps explain the emphasis on Jesus’ innocence in the latter chapters of Luke. 2) He may have been a high priest because there was a high priest of the same name, although he served at a time much earlier than most scholars believe this gospel was written; or 3) He may have not been a specific person at all. The name “Theophilus” means “lover of God,” so the name could suggest the book was written to anyone who loves God and his Messiah. Regardless of who Theophilus was, Luke’s gospel speaks to all who want to know Jesus.

- C. These verses confirm that Luke has thoroughly investigated everything he writes about, and that he has set out to write an orderly account that will reveal the truth. He mentions that others—eyewitnesses—have already written stories about Jesus. We can assume he had read these stories, which probably included at least the gospels of Matthew and Mark. One thing scholars have confirmed is that Luke was written in perfect Greek (as was Acts), and his writing is that of a highly educated man interested in detail, particularly medical detail, that others may have overlooked.

IV. Luke 1:5-25 The birth of John the Baptist foretold

- A. Verse 5 tells us the events he is about to describe occurred during the reign of King Herod of Judea—also known as Herod the Great. But it tells us much more than just *when* the events occurred. It was the equivalent of saying if these events took place in Germany that it was during the dictatorship of Adolph Hitler, or if in the Soviet Union, during the reign of Joseph Stalin. This Herod was a monster who murdered both of his brothers-in-law, as well as his own wife and her mother. As he was approaching the time of his own death, he issued a decree that certain prominent citizens of Israel be arrested and gathered together in one place to be

executed upon his death so there would be mourning in Israel when he died. In short, it was a turbulent time and one of great danger and uncertainty.

- B. Both Zechariah and his wife were of priestly lineage, and both are described as “righteous before God.” Despite this, Elizabeth was barren, and apparently beyond her child-bearing years. In that culture, being barren usually was accompanied by some level of disgrace in the community because many believed being barren was the result of sin in the life of the husband or wife.
- C. The story begins with Zechariah being chosen “by lot” to enter the sanctuary of the Lord in the Temple to offer incense. This was a once-in-a-lifetime event for him, and it would have been the highlight of his entire career as a priest. While he goes into the sanctuary alone, the people are outside the sanctuary praying. As he approached the alter within the sanctuary suddenly there was an angel standing on the right side of the alter, and Luke tells us Zechariah was terrified—which seems to be the normal response when someone sees an angel. The angel, we learn, was Gabriel, an archangel whose position places him continually in the presence of God. He tells Zechariah his apparently barren wife will bear him a son to be named John. But he tells him more than that. Regarding the son to be born, he says “With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” This is a direct reference to the prophecy given in Malachi 4:5-6. “Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.” As a priest, Zechariah would have known this prophecy and would have known the angel was telling him his son would be the “Elijah” who was to precede the coming of the Messiah. For a priest especially, this would have been astoundingly good news.
- D. What was Zechariah’s response? “How can I know this for sure? After all, I’m an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.” In other words, “I’m too old to have a child.” A man that should have known that God can do anything, questions

what the archangel of God is telling him. The one who should have understood, didn't. You can almost feel the frustration in Gabriel's response. "I am Gabriel; I stand in the very presence of God, and I have been sent to deliver this good news to you. But you don't believe me. As a result, you will be mute until these events come to pass." A very chastened Zechariah exits the sanctuary to an audience wondering why he was in there so long. He's unable to speak, and the people realize he has seen a vision. As Gabriel foretold, Elizabeth does become pregnant, but she remains in seclusion for five months, perhaps like her husband unable to believe the wonderful promise of the angel will come to fruition.

V. Luke 1:26-38 The birth of Jesus foretold

A. The sixth month referenced in verse 26 is the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Again, it is Gabriel who comes to give Mary the good news. Unlike Zechariah, she's not terrified, but highly perplexed by his greeting. He tells her not to be afraid. Then he tells her she has found favor with God. She will bear a son to be named Jesus who will be called the Son of God and will inherit the throne of David. So, the news she received is even more overwhelming than the news given to Zechariah. But she's only a thirteen or fourteen-year-old girl who did not have the education of a priest. Nor did she have a husband, although she was engaged. So, it's hardly surprising that in her innocence she asks Gabriel, "How can this be since I'm a virgin; I don't have a husband?" Gabriel's reply must have been mystifying, although reassuring. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will over-shadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." He goes on to tell her Elizabeth, her relative, has conceived in her old age and is in her sixth month. Nothing is impossible with God.

B. I'm sure Mary didn't fully understand all of this. How could she? We struggle to understand all of this two thousand years later even with the benefit of scripture and the teachings of the church. But she understood enough to respond in faith. Despite all of the challenges of becoming pregnant before marriage—which she undoubtedly realized would probably lead her fiancée to terminate their engagement, she replies, "Here am I, the servant of the lord; let it be with me according to your word." She obviously says these words in faith, although likely with some fear of all this may entail. It's a reminder to us that even when we respond in faith to what God is leading us to do, that does not necessarily mean the path will be easy or without struggles or setbacks along the way. But it also reminds us that when we respond to God's direction in our lives, he will be with us every step of the way. What more could we ask for?

VI. Luke 1:39-56 Mary visits Elizabeth/Mary's song of praise

- A. Confirming my belief that Mary realized how difficult her situation would be in Nazareth, she immediately leaves to visit her relative Elizabeth in the hill country who was also pregnant according to Gabriel. Mary's situation in Nazareth would have been exceedingly difficult, and she needed someone to bolster her faith for the path that lay ahead for her. When she arrives, she gets a faith booster on steroids. As soon as Elizabeth hears Mary's greeting, she tells Mary her child leaped in her womb. "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?" She recognizes Mary's faith in saying, "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." Elizabeth is acknowledging how difficult it must have been for Mary to accept what Gabriel had told her and how remarkable it was that such a young woman would readily accept the angel's word. This is one reason Mary is venerated by the church, and rightfully so.
- B. Mary's response is one of the most beautiful songs in all of scripture—the Magnificat. Clearly, it was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it reveals her humility, the awe with which she acknowledges what has happened to her, and the faith she has that God will bring to fruition that which the angel promised her. It is worth reading not just at Christmas but anytime our faith begins to flag.
- C. Verse 56 tells us Mary stayed three months before returning home. This was a time for her to strengthen her faith and prepare herself for the difficult road that lay ahead. Matthew 1:18-21 tells us that when Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant, he decided to dismiss her quietly—in other words, cancel the engagement, although he would not make a public spectacle of it. He probably only learned she was pregnant when Mary returned from visiting Elizabeth because Luke was explicit that Mary left to visit her "with haste" following Gabriel's visit. Joseph's response is understandable; most men don't want to marry a woman pregnant with another man's child. But in another remarkable show of faith, Joseph accepts the word of the angel given to him in a dream to go forward with the engagement because the child to be born is from the Holy Spirit, not Mary being unfaithful. Joseph was only human, and it would have been easy for him to dismiss the dream as the result of something bad he had eaten that day, especially when everyone in Nazareth would have been

gossiping about Mary getting pregnant before getting married, and probably by someone other than Joseph. But he, like Mary, accepted the word of the angel and didn't break the engagement even with the ridicule he, like Mary, would have to endure from their neighbors.

VII. Luke 1:57-80 The birth of John the Baptist; Zechariah's prophecy

- A. The story reverts to the birth of John the Baptist. The child is born in due course, and all Elizabeth's friends and neighbors are rejoicing with this couple who had seemed destined to remain childless. As was the Jewish custom, on the eighth day after the birth the child was brought to the local synagogue for circumcision and to be named. Everyone thought he would be named Zechariah after his father, as was the custom. When Elizabeth protested that he would be named "John" it created a kerfuffle among the friends and relatives because there was no one among the relatives named John. Zechariah can't comment on this dispute because he's still mute. But he asks for a tablet and writes, "His name is John." All of those present are amazed and undoubtedly perplexed.
- B. Why were they amazed and perplexed? Put yourself in their shoes. This priest, whom they have known forever, goes into the sanctuary of the Temple in a once-in-a-lifetime event to offer incense and comes out unable to speak, clearly having had a vision of some type. Then, they later learn that Zechariah and Elizabeth, who is way beyond her child-bearing years, are going to have a baby. When the child is born the father is still mute, but for some unknown reason the mother wants to name him John rather than Zechariah, which they probably thought was an insult to the father. But when the father is asked what the name should be, he agrees it is John. Whereupon he is suddenly able to speak once more and begins to praise God. Verse 65 says fear came over all the neighbors, and these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. That's probably an understatement. Imagine the talk if that happened in our church! They wondered what in the world this child was going to be.
- C. Verse 63 says they were amazed. They were probably even more amazed when Zechariah gave his prophecy over John, especially when he says in verse 76, "You, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to

prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.” Keep in mind, there had been no prophet in Israel for 400 years before John. So, this child was clearly someone special, and they were amazed and in awe. Verse 80 says the child grew and became strong in the spirit, living in the wilderness until his public ministry began.

VIII. Luke 2:1-20 The birth of Jesus/the shepherds and angels

- A. As the time approached for Mary to deliver her baby, a complication arose. The current emperor, Caesar Augustus, declared that a census should take place throughout the entire Roman Empire, which included Judea and Galilee. Once again, it is helpful to know something about the times into which Jesus was born. As we will see, it was a much more tumultuous time than the time in which we live.

- B. Caesar Augustus was born Gaius Octavius in 63 B.C. His mother was the niece of Julius Caesar, who adopted him as his son and heir. Julius Caesar died when Octavius was only eighteen years old, and Octavius later became the principate or emperor of Rome. He took on the name of Caesar Augustus and thereafter all future emperors of Rome took on the name Caesar as a title. After his death, Julius Caesar had been declared a god of the Roman state, and therefore Augustus was declared to be a “son of god.” His reign lasted from 31 B.C. until 14 A.D. According to historians, Augustus was a bloodthirsty tyrant, comparable to Hitler or Mussolini. In short, it was a time of upheaval as the Roman state was in the process of changing from a republic to an empire where the emperor held all the power. The fact that he declared that a census be taken and that everyone had to travel to their ancestral home for census purposes, confirms that he was an ambitious tyrant.

- C. And so it was that a very pregnant Mary had to make the difficult and dangerous trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem with Joseph, to whom she was betrothed. Betrothal was a legal relationship that was something more than a modern engagement. Once someone was betrothed, it could only be canceled or terminated by a divorce proceeding. They were going to Bethlehem because Joseph was a descendant of David, and that is where he had to go for the census.

- D. Due to her condition, it must have been a difficult trip. It would have been difficult even if she were not well into her pregnancy; but she was close to her due date by this time. And to make matters worse, once they arrived there was no place for them to stay in the inn—apparently the only one in Bethlehem. The best the innkeeper could do was allow them to stay in the smelly barn where the animals were housed. There, our Lord and savior was born, under the most primitive of conditions, with no midwife to assist with the birth. There was no cradle for the child. The best the mother and father could do was wrap him in rags and place him in a feeding trough, for that’s what a manger is. It was far from the pristine Christmas-card picture we are used to seeing, and it would have been a challenging time for mother and father. Yet, due to the announcement both had received from the angels, they would have understood that this was God’s doing, and they both had submitted themselves to God’s will.
- E. The story then shifts to the fields outside Bethlehem where shepherds were tending sheep. To say this was an unlikely lot to whom the announcement of the birth of the Messiah was given is an understatement. Shepherds were not highly regarded in Jewish culture at that time. In fact, they were deemed so unreliable that the rabbis banned them from testifying in court. They were almost as marginalized in Jewish society as women were. And yet, this is the first group to whom the birth of Jesus was announced, something we should keep in mind whenever we deal with marginalized people. God often seems to single out marginalized people for his purposes.
- F. Put yourself in the shepherds’ shoes. They are engaged in their routine duty of protecting their sheep from wolves, bears or thieves on a clear night when suddenly the night sky lights up and an angel appears to them. Luke says they were “terrified,” as we would be, too. But the angel tells them not to be afraid. He has an announcement—good news—for them. The long-awaited Messiah has been born in Bethlehem. But his next words must have been mystifying to them. Like all Jews, they looked forward to the coming of the Messiah who would deliver them from their enemies and lead Israel back to the prominence Israel had during the reigns of David and Solomon. Yet, the angel tells them, the baby will be wrapped in rags and lying in

a feeding trough in a barn. But immediately after the angel told them this, the whole sky was filled with a multitude of angels—apparently thousands—all praising God for what has happened. They had to be dumbfounded, bewildered, and amazed. But they were determined to see for themselves what the angel had announced. They probably were having trouble believing what they had just seen and heard. So, off they went.

G. Now consider the scene from the perspective of Mary and Joseph. By now, they are totally exhausted from the trip and a difficult delivery. But huddled together in the smelly barn with their newborn now lying in a feeding trough, they must have marveled that what the angel had told them had come to pass, although probably not like they had envisioned it upon receiving the announcement. I doubt Mary had pictured the birth of her child taking place in the presence of cows, lambs and assorted other animals in a barn. Then, as they are finally getting some rest, a gaggle of shepherds shows up with the most amazing story. Not only had they seen one angel—as Mary and Joseph did—they had seen a host of thousands, all of whom were proclaiming the birth of their son and praising God. It was an angel who directed the shepherds to find Mary, Joseph and the child in this remote place, so their appearance must have confirmed to Mary and Joseph again that God had chosen them for the unique task of being parents to the Messiah, the Son of God. In my mind's eye I see Mary and Joseph both overwhelmed by these events, but with their faith growing that God had done in their lives what he said he would do. Verse 19 says Mary “treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.” I'm sure she did.

IX. Luke 2:21-40 Jesus is named/ presented in the Temple

A. As good Jews, Joseph and Mary had Jesus circumcised and named on the eighth day after his birth. Then, on the fortieth day after his birth there was the purification rite for Mary, followed thereafter by Jesus' dedication as the first born at the Temple. All of these ceremonies were pursuant to Jewish law. Their sacrifice at the Temple was a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons, which indicates that they were of modest means; otherwise, they would have offered a lamb. Jesus came to fulfill the law, and these ceremonies are part of that fulfillment.

- B. It is at the dedication ceremony of Jesus that Simeon appears. We know nothing about this man Simeon except what is presented here. He was righteous and devout, filled with the Holy Spirit who guided him to go to the Temple—a massive thirty-five acre complex—the very day Jesus was being dedicated. Simeon was—like Zechariah—a representative of the Old Testament world in which faith was expressed primarily by waiting for God’s promises to come to pass; in the New Testament world, faith is expressed by being obedient and following Christ’s instructions. So, the old world is meeting the new world, and Simeon’s comments reflect that and embrace the new world.
- C. Simeon acknowledges that Jesus’ presence at this ceremony is the fulfillment of God’s promise to him that he would see the Messiah. His comments also acknowledge that Jesus’ presence is not only for the glory of Israel, but also “a light for revelation to the Gentiles.” This is one of the themes we will see repeatedly in Luke’s gospel—Jesus came not just for the Jews but for all mankind. Simeon then blessed Joseph and Mary, but also warns Mary that the path ahead, although glorious, will be difficult. “A sword will pierce your own soul,” he tells her.
- D. There was another person at the Temple that day who recognized who Jesus was—a woman named Anna, whom Luke tells us was a widow and also a prophet. She also praised God and told everyone there Jesus had come for the redemption of Jerusalem—which was a figure of speech for the redemption of all Israel. Luke tells us Joseph and Mary were amazed at what was being said about Jesus. Undoubtedly, this bolstered their faith yet again that God had chosen them for a unique role as parents of the Messiah.
- E. Verses 39 and 40 tell us that when they had fulfilled the requirements of the law, they returned to Nazareth. Matthew’s gospel, however, tells us that before returning to Nazareth, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fled to Egypt to escape from Herod—known as Herod the Great—who decreed that all Jewish boys in and around Bethlehem under two years old were to be put to death because he learned from the wise men that a king of the Jews had been born in Bethlehem. But an angel from God warned Joseph

in a dream to flee to protect Jesus and his parents. After Herod the Great died, they returned to Nazareth and Jesus grew up there becoming strong physically, mentally, and spiritually with the favor of God upon him.

X. Luke 2:41-52 The boy Jesus in the Temple

A. There were three great feasts of Judaism (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles) to which all Jews living within a certain distance of Jerusalem were required by law to attend. The feast described here was Passover. Apparently, the family traveled to Jerusalem as part of a large group of friends and families in which the children would mingle with any of the families in the group. Apparently, there was so much trust and togetherness in their group that Joseph and Mary were not concerned Jesus wasn't with them as they departed Jerusalem and headed back to Nazareth. Not until they camped on the first night of the return trip when they couldn't find Jesus in the camp did they realize Jesus wasn't anywhere in the group.

B. Put yourself in Joseph and Mary's shoes. They both were told by angels that Mary would have a son that would be known as the Messiah, the Son of God. That message was reinforced by Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, as well as the shepherds, Simeon and Anna, and who knows who else. Imagine the responsibility they felt as they raised their son, who was also the Son of God. Now they have lost him! Imagine what was going through their minds as they hasten back to Jerusalem to look for their twelve-year-old son. I know I would have been in full panic mode at that point. It takes three panic-filled days of searching all of Jerusalem before they finally find him in the Temple complex. It was the custom of the Sanhedrin Court to hold public discussion of the law during the three big festivals, probably in one of the courts of the Temple complex. And there Jesus was—listening and asking questions. Luke tells us that all who heard his questions and observed his understanding of the law were amazed by him. Luke also tells us his parents were astonished that this was where he was.

C. Mary was clearly put out by what he had done. Her question—“Child, why have you treated us like this?”—was a rebuke. And she and Joseph apparently didn't understand—or perhaps even appreciate then—his response. “Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?” This response indicates that even at the tender age of twelve Jesus had begun to understand who he was. We don't know precisely when he fully realized he was the Son of God, but his response here indicates he was well on his way to such an understanding. We might find it puzzling that his parents didn't understand Jesus'

reference to being in his Father's house in light of all of the revelations they had received about who Jesus was. But they were only human, and even though they knew Jesus was someone special in God's eyes, they didn't yet understand fully who Jesus was—as we will see when we get to chapter eight.

D. But scripture does not indicate that any similar event occurred thereafter during Jesus' youth. Luke tells us Jesus returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to his parents. He increased in wisdom as he grew up, and he grew in favor with God and man. Luke also tells us Mary treasured all of these things in her heart. It was undoubtedly Mary whom Luke interviewed to learn all of these stories about the birth and early years of Jesus' life. We should be especially grateful to Luke that he preserved these stories of the birth and early years of Jesus' life.

XI. Luke 3:1-20 The Proclamation of John the Baptist

- A. This chapter begins about eighteen years after Jesus' visit to the Temple when he was twelve years old. We know this because Luke tells us it was the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius. His reign began in A.D. 14, so it is A.D. 29.

- B. Augustus has died, and Tiberius is now emperor. He continues a long line of despicable emperors of Rome. Tiberius' reign was one of instability, dread, and terror. He got his character honestly; his mother was the infamous Livia, who was suspected of poisoning numerous people. Tiberius' reign was also noted for the appearance of a notorious man named Sejanus who manipulated himself into the number two position in Rome, second only to Tiberius himself. Then, in A.D. 31 he became consul, which in effect made him virtually the co-emperor with Tiberius who had shirked his duties as emperor—even leaving Rome for extensive periods of time—allowing Sejanus to seize more and more power. It was Sejanus who was responsible for the appointment of Pontius Pilate as the prefect (or administrator) of Judea, which is why Pilate wound up being the Roman official who ordered the crucifixion of Jesus, although he repeatedly declared Jesus to be innocent. Eventually Sejanus' devious plots were exposed, and he was executed upon the order of Tiberius. How the mighty have fallen.

- C. Other leaders listed by Luke to set the time and context of John's appearance were Pontius Pilate and three of the sons of Herod the Great, whose kingdom was

divided into four separate areas—called tetrarchies—following his death. The only son relevant to our study was Herod Antipas. He's the one who imprisoned and eventually had John the Baptist executed. John was imprisoned by him because John denounced him for stealing his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, and marrying her, in defiance of Jewish law. It was Herodias who instructed her daughter, Salome, to ask Herod for the head of John the Baptist after Herod offered Salome anything she asked as a reward for her provocative dance before a drunken Herod and his friends. (See Mark 6:14-29). Luke also mentions the high priests Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas. It was Caiaphas who presided over Jesus' Jewish trial that led to his crucifixion, but despite Annas no longer being the high priest, Jesus was first taken to Annas for questioning after his arrest, which illustrates the power and influence Annas continued to hold although he was no longer *officially* high priest at the time.

- D. In short, this was a cast of unsavory characters who held power at the time John began his ministry, with Jesus soon to begin his. They all were guilty of corruption, greed, and the irresponsible wielding of power, which led to fear, injustice, and a foreboding culture. This is the world into which John the Baptist brought his message.
- E. We know nothing about John after he was eight days old until he began his ministry, except that he “became strong in spirit and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.” It is somewhat surprising that John became such a popular prophet. His message was that Israel was so far from God that they needed to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Whereas we recognize our need for baptism, it was not common for Jews to be baptized. They viewed themselves as the people of God; only Gentiles were so far from God they needed to be baptized. But John told the Jews just being descendants of Abraham was not enough; they had to repent and evidence that repentance by being baptized. As Luke points out, he was fulfilling the message foretold by Isaiah: “Prepare the way of the Lord.” He was not bringing the “good news” that Jesus would bring, but he was preparing the people for the good news to come. John's message engendered a response from those who heard him. It was, “What should we do?” John's response was Old Testament: do the right thing; share your

possessions, don't steal, be satisfied with your wages; in other words, keep the law.

- F. This was a time in which all of Israel was expecting the coming of the Messiah, and those expectations were heightened because Israel was an occupied country, oppressed by the Romans. So, speculation quickly arose over whether John might be the Messiah. He was quick to tamp down any such thoughts. He not only denied being the Messiah but said he was not even worthy to untie the strap of the sandals of the one to come. Untying the strap of someone else's sandals was considered so degrading that even a slave should not be required to do it. But John was prepared to do whatever it took to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord as he fulfilled Isaiah's words of one crying out in the wilderness.
- G. In verses 18-20, Luke jumps ahead in the story to tell his readers that John's message of the need for repentance—specifically Herod's need for repentance for marrying his brother's wife—led to his being put in prison. But that comes after John baptized Jesus.

XII. Luke 3:21-38 The baptism of Jesus/his ancestors

- A. The baptism of Jesus raises the question why was he baptized by John? Remember, John's baptism was for the remission of sins, and Jesus was sinless, as scripture clearly proclaims. John recognized this; in fact, he was reluctant to baptize Jesus. As Matthew's gospel says, John told Jesus he needed to be baptized by Jesus, not the other way around. But Jesus was not being baptized for repentance; he was being baptized to *identify* with those who actually needed baptism—which includes all of us. In a similar fashion, he will later die on a cross, not because he was guilty, but because of the guilt of those with whom he will identify and for us sinners for whom he will pay the ultimate price. On the cross, he will die for sins he never committed so he can forgive those who have sinned.

- B. As Jesus was baptized, Luke tells us he was praying; Luke also tells us heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove. A voice from heaven affirmed he was God's son, with whom his Father was well pleased. Scripture is unclear whether others could see heaven opened and hear the words spoken.
- C. In verses 23-38 Luke lists the ancestors of Jesus. Many detractors of the reliability of scripture point out that the genealogy given by Luke differs considerably from that listed in Matthew's gospel. Like all such apparent discrepancies, however, there is a reasonable explanation that resolves the apparent discrepancy. First, Matthew's genealogy goes back only to Abraham, whereas Luke takes his all the way back to Adam. Matthew's genealogy represents Joseph's line, whereas Luke's follows Mary's line. After all, Luke never interviewed Joseph, whereas Mary was surely the primary source Luke relied on for the chapters we have just covered. The lines differ from Jesus back to David, but thereafter they are similar, except Luke goes all the way back to Adam. We moderns may ask why Luke and Matthew included the genealogy of Jesus. The genealogies confirm the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the Messiah, and they confirm the revelation of God's plan for mankind from the very beginning through the appearance of God's own son to redeem mankind. Therefore, they are not extraneous to the story being told, but rather an integral part of the story.

XIII. Luke 4:1-13 The temptation of Jesus

- A. Luke tells us that Jesus returned from the Jordan following his baptism full of the Holy Spirit. But before he actually begins his ministry, he was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for a period of testing. It was a time of preparation for what was to come, and we learn that he fasted for forty days before the temptations began, when Jesus would have been at his weakest physically. There were three temptations presented to him, and each of them was similar to a temptation to the people of Israel during their period of forty years of wandering in the wilderness after Moses led them out of Egypt. Israel failed the test each time they were tempted, whereas Jesus passed his tests with flying colors. How he did so is instructive to us.

- B. We might well ask why it was necessary for Jesus to be tested like this. After all, he had just heard from God himself that he was the Son in whom God was well pleased. Yet, that sonship had not yet been challenged or tested. If Jesus was going to fulfill the mission his Father had given him, which would end with his crucifixion and resurrection, he had to be prepared and totally reliant on his Father. Otherwise, he would have been overwhelmed by the enormity of what was expected of him.
- C. The first temptation attacks him where he was weakest. He had not eaten in forty days, so he was famished. Satan challenged his sonship by saying *if* you are the Son of God, prove it by turning this stone into bread. Satan is not just challenging him to perform a miracle; he is pressuring him to renounce his complete faith in his Father. Jesus clearly had the power to perform this miracle; he will later feed five thousand with a few fish and loaves. Israel had grumbled during their wandering in the desert that God had led them out of Egypt to starve in the desert. Deuteronomy 8:3 addressed the situation Israel faced. It says, “He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” It is this verse which Jesus quotes in part to rebuke Satan’s temptation. As with the other two temptations, Jesus relied upon scripture to resist temptation—a scripture that is rather obscure to us because we tend not to study Deuteronomy in depth. Surely there is a lesson here for us that knowledge of scripture is essential to Christians if we are to withstand temptations that will come our way.
- D. The next temptation is difficult for us even to imagine. Jesus is somehow taken up to a place where he can see all the kingdoms of the world. Satan offers Jesus all their power and glory if Jesus will just worship him. Remember, Jesus is the Son of God, but he is very human at this time. This had to be a great temptation, and it had echoes of the temptation Israel faced as Moses went up the mountain to receive the law from God as told in the book of Exodus. This is the law that God gave the Israelites so they would live as the people of God. Yet when Moses returned, tablets of the law in hand, what did he find? The people were worshipping a golden calf. God had promised them a land flowing with milk and honey, but

even as the law was being given to them through Moses, they worshiped a false god. Jesus, on the other hand, responded again by quoting Deuteronomy (Deut 6:13), “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only,” rejecting Satan’s offer of worldly power and glory.

- E. The final temptation again challenges Jesus to prove who he claims to be. Satan takes him to the pinnacle of the temple and says to him, prove yourself to be who you claim to be by throwing yourself off and relying on angels to protect you. Satan misquotes Psalm 91 which speaks of trusting God in any calamity with the expectation God will protect the supplicant. Jesus clearly understood that Satan was taking that psalm entirely out of context; he responded by quoting Deuteronomy yet again—this time Deut. 6:16—“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” This quote arose from another example of Israel failing a test when they came to Rephidim and again complained about Moses’ leadership because there was no water there, as described in Exodus chapter 17. Jesus’ response is appropriate and available to any believer presented with a temptation to rely upon God when they are doing something they clearly know they are not supposed to do: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test”

- F. Having successfully passed each of the tests presented to him, Jesus is now prepared to begin his ministry.

XIV. Luke 4:14-41 The Galilean Ministry/Rejection at Nazareth

- A. Upon returning from his temptations in the wilderness, Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee, and he does so according to Luke, “filled with the power of the Spirit.” The combination of the Holy Spirit descending on him at his baptism, joined by the voice of God affirming his sonship, followed by his successful overcoming the temptations presented to him in the wilderness have prepared Jesus to commence his ministry, and he does so in Galilee, the region where he grew up. He taught in synagogues and was well received initially. Luke says he “was praised by everyone,” and his reputation quickly spread. In due course, he comes to Nazareth, where he grew up. Nazareth is in Galilee, and they had undoubtedly heard the good reports about Jesus. Initially, this favorable reaction to his message carried over to Nazareth, but as we see from the

story, they quickly turned against him. There was a tradition in the synagogue services that at the close of the service a practice called the Haphtarah took place, whereby any young man from the community could read a portion of the prophets and comment on the passage if he wished. Jesus chose a passage from Isaiah that described what his ministry was about. He will preach his message to the poor, not just to the rich and powerful; he will set the captives free—those captive to sin, as well as those captive to oppression and injustice; and he will bring healing to those in need of physical or spiritual healing. The last portion of the Isaiah quote is, “the year of the Lord’s favor.” This had reference to the year of jubilee which is described in Leviticus 25. Every fifty years, all debts would be cancelled, and all slaves would be set free, followed by a year of celebration. Unfortunately, there is no reliable record that Israel ever put into place the requirements of the year of jubilee.

- B. The words of Isaiah that Jesus quoted are familiar to us and are comforting. They proclaimed a day when the poor and oppressed would find comfort and relief. However, the religious world of Jesus’ day concluded and taught that the poor were poor because they were sinners and therefore were cursed by God. One reason Jesus’ message was so readily accepted by the poor and disadvantaged was that he didn’t curse them; he blessed them. His message was that this world is not the only world, and in the world to come, the poor and the wealthy would often trade places. The poor, the sick, and the possessed were drawn to him because he showed compassion, not because they fully understood his message or his purpose in being here; but they could recognize his compassionate heart. Another of Isaiah’s prophecies was that the Messiah would be a “man of sorrows,” acquainted with our deepest griefs. And in his ministry, Jesus identified with the pain and sorrows of the people, and he eventually shared in them on the cross. He fed them when they were hungry; he healed them when they were sick or possessed; and he presented them with a message of hope for the forgiveness of their sins and reconciliation with God.
- C. Although the citizens of Nazareth initially seemed receptive to his message and spoke highly of him, that quickly came to an end when Jesus reminded them that Gentiles had often received God’s blessings even when Israelites had not. He referred to the widow of Zarephath in Sidon who had been miraculously fed while many Israelites went hungry (I Kings 17:18-24). He also cited Naaman, the Syrian army commander who had been healed of his leprosy whereas many Israelites with leprosy had not

been healed (II Kings 5:1-14). Combined with Jesus telling them a prophet is not honored in his own hometown, the people in the synagogue became enraged and led Jesus to edge of a hill where they intended to throw him down and stone him—an act that seems to me to be a gross overreaction to anything Jesus said, although it’s a foreshadowing of many more such reactions to Jesus that are to come. We don’t know precisely how it happened, but Luke tells us that Jesus “passed through the midst of them and went on his way.” Luke does not record Jesus ever returning to Nazareth.

XV. Luke 4:31-37 The man with an unclean spirit

- A. After his expulsion from Nazareth, Jesus goes to Capernaum, which becomes his headquarters while he is in Galilee. Capernaum is also the hometown of Peter, and perhaps James and John as well, and Jesus apparently stayed at Peter’s house. Luke tells us that Jesus went to the synagogue on the sabbath to teach. They were amazed at his teaching because he taught them *with authority*. What amazed them about his teaching with authority is that it was so different from how the rabbis taught. They would always base their teaching on the opinions of other rabbis—usually the most respected ones. They would never teach based on their own opinions or authority. Jesus, on the other hand, quoted only scripture, not what others said about it, and he explained the scriptures without citing to any other authority. He was his own authority. Before the service was over, however, Jesus demonstrated his authority in another way.
- B. As Jesus was teaching, a man possessed by a demon shouted out, “Let us alone,” indicating he was possessed by more than one demon. “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy one of God.” You can imagine what effect this had on those present. Just imagine what it would do to one of our services, and you get the picture. The words, “I know who you are,” was a magical formula used to gain power over someone who was more powerful, and it was often used in ancient magic spells to subdue spiritual powers. Somehow, knowing the name of a spiritual opponent was supposed to give you power over them. But these words had no power over Jesus; he immediately rebuked the spirit and told him to be silent and come out of him. Although Jesus was, in fact, the Holy One of God, Jesus did not want that announcement coming from a demon. The

demon had no choice but to obey. Just as scripture tells us the universe came into existence upon the spoken word of God, all it took from Jesus was the words, “come out of him,” to exorcise the demon. Luke tells us the demon made one last effort to harm the man by throwing him down, but he was unharmed. Not surprisingly, everyone present was amazed. They had been amazed that Jesus taught with authority; now they are amazed that he commanded unclean spirits to come out of the man upon his word alone. Luke comments that reports about Jesus spread throughout Galilee, which is not unexpected after events like this.

XVI. LUKE 4:38-44 Healings at Peter’s house/Preaching in the synagogues

- A. Immediately after the events at the synagogue, Jesus returns to Peter’s house where Peter’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, which in those days was a serious condition. Again, Jesus showed his power by doing nothing more than verbally commanding the fever to leave her, which it did at once, thus demonstrating Jesus’ power not just over demons, but over sickness and fevers as well. This story also tells us something about Peter’s mother-in-law. Note that her response to her healing was to immediately get up and serve them.

- B. As you might expect, the events of that day, together with reports about Jesus the people had heard previously, drew those in the community who were sick or had health issues to flock to Jesus for healing. Luke tells us he healed all who came to him, and he cast out demons from those possessed. He also rebuked the demons who identified him as the Son of God, the Messiah. We might wonder why Jesus would rebuke them for telling the truth about who he was. The reason was that this was the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He had much to accomplish before his earthly ministry would end by his going to the cross. Declaring someone to be the Messiah was not just a spiritual statement; it was a political statement in that country; in effect, it was saying that Jesus, as the Messiah, was Israel’s true king and ruler, not the Roman authorities. Remember how Herod the Great responded when the wise men told him a king had been born in Bethlehem? He had all the male babies under two years old put to death. We will see repeatedly throughout Luke that Jesus instructs people not to declare him king or even to tell of his healing them. It was not yet God’s timing for this announcement to be made publicly.

C. The next morning, Jesus went into a deserted place to pray, and the people went looking for him. They even tried to prevent him from leaving them. But it wasn't because they wanted to hear more of his teaching. They wanted him there to heal them and to provide for their other needs. Jesus viewed his primary task as telling the people the good news of the kingdom of God, and he responded to their efforts to keep him there by saying he was sent to proclaim the good news—that was the primary purpose for which he was sent, and he had to spread it throughout Galilee. This is a dynamic we will see repeatedly throughout Luke. The people are drawn to Jesus more for his healing and feeding them than for his message—which they often didn't understand. True to his word, Luke tells us Jesus continued to proclaim his message of the kingdom of God throughout the synagogues of Galilee.

XVII. Luke 5:1-11 Jesus calls the first disciples

A. Jesus has been staying at the home of Peter—called Simon before Jesus changed his name to Peter. One day as Jesus is trying to teach a crowd that was pressing in on him by the lake of Gennesaret—also called the Sea of Galilee, the large lake through which the Jordan River flows—he noticed there were two boats there where the fishermen were washing their nets after a night of fishing. As it turns out, these boats were owned by Peter and his partners James and John in the fishing business. To give himself a platform removed slightly from the crowd so he could address all of them, Jesus asked Peter to allow him to use his boat, and he put out a little way so he could teach from there. Once the teaching was concluded, Jesus told Peter to put out the boats again and let down the nets for a catch. Peter and his partners had been fishing all night and caught nothing—as he told Jesus—but by now Peter had seen what Jesus can do, and he reluctantly followed Jesus' instructions. I say reluctantly because Peter was the fisherman, not Jesus, and although he was being obedient, he apparently wasn't expecting to catch much. To his surprise, when they let down the nets on Peter's boat, they caught so many fish, the nets were about to break; Peter had to call his partners to come help haul in the catch.

B. Although this isn't listed as one of Jesus' miracles, Peter realized this was no ordinary catch. Luke tells us Peter and his partners were amazed by the catch. Clearly, Peter was. Note his response; he fell down before Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." This obviously wasn't what Peter actually wanted, but he recognized he was a sinner in the presence of the Son of God. His response brings

echoes of Isaiah's response when he saw a vision of God in the temple (Isaiah 6:1-5). "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips." Throughout scripture, when someone is confronted by an angel or a vision of God, it makes them acutely aware of their own sinfulness compared to the holiness of God. Jesus recognized that Peter was fearful and told him, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." After bringing their boats to shore with their amazing catch, Luke tells us Peter and his partners left everything and followed him. They became Jesus' first disciples.

XVIII. Luke 5:12-16 Jesus cleanses a leper

- A. Just as Peter fell down before Jesus upon recognizing the holiness of Jesus as a result of the incredible catch of fish, this story begins with a leper falling facedown before Jesus and declaring in faith, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean," which meant he would be healed. Jesus responded to the man's faith as he always did, and he healed him just by a spoken word. But Jesus did something else that would have shocked those present as much as seeing the man healed. Jesus touched him. According to the law, one should never touch an item that was unclean and certainly not a person that was unclean. That would make the person touching the unclean person unclean himself. This episode, as much as any other in the New Testament, shows that a new relationship with God was at hand. When Jesus touched an unclean person, that person became clean, and his body was healed.
- B. As we will see repeatedly, Jesus instructed the leper to tell no one how he was healed—indicating there probably were not a lot of people around when the healing occurred—but to go his priest and follow the requirements of the law. Of course, such good news as this couldn't be kept secret and the crowds increased. Jesus' response to this increased attention and demands on him is instructional for us. Luke tells us he often withdrew to deserted places to pray. If Jesus, the Son of God, who was fully within the will of God in what he was doing, found it necessary to withdraw often to pray, how much more should we be finding a time and place to pray regularly.

XVIX. Luke 5:17-26 Jesus heals a paralytic

A. It appears Jesus is back in Capernaum, and if so, it's likely he was at Peter's house. What is obvious here is that the word has gotten around about Jesus, and the establishment wants to check him out. Luke tells us that scribes and Pharisees from throughout Galilee and Judea, including Jerusalem, were there. They were not there to be taught by him; they were there to critique his message to help determine how to deal with him. Although he was there to teach, his fame was more for healing, so some friends of a paralyzed man brought him to Jesus to be healed. There were so many people in the house and spilling outside that they couldn't get him in, so very ingeniously they decided to cut a hole in the ceiling to lower him into the presence of Jesus. Luke says that when he saw their faith—apparently referring to the friends as well as the paralytic—Jesus said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” In my imagination, the room is instantly filled with a stunned silence, followed quickly thereafter by murmuring among the scribes and Pharisees who quite correctly say that no one but God alone can forgive sins. To them, Jesus was committing blasphemy. At this point the crowd doesn't know what to think; they have no way of confirming whether the man's sins have actually been forgiven or not. Remember, the belief among Jews at the time was that sickness or infirmity was usually the result of sin. So, Jesus has proclaimed the man's sins forgiven, but he is still lying on his bed. But Jesus then addressed the elephant in the room—did Jesus have the authority to forgive sins? “Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or ‘Stand up and walk?’ But so that you will know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,”—and at this point he turns to the man on his bed and says, “Stand up, take your bed, and go home.” And he did!

B. Luke says amazement seized everyone there. Most of the people—including the scribes and Pharisees—were amazed by the healing, but they were also amazed that Jesus purported to forgive sins and then proved his authority by the healing. That was unprecedented. Something else would have amazed the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus referred to himself as the “Son of Man.” This wasn't Jesus saying, “I am human just like you.” His using the title “Son of Man” referenced Daniel 7:13-14, where Daniel had a series of night visions: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” So, Jesus is indirectly saying that this power referenced in Daniel had

been given to him as he has just demonstrated. It would have been a dumbfounding moment for the scribes and Pharisees, although Luke tells us the crowd glorified God and were filled with awe.

XX. LUKE 5:27-32 Jesus calls Levi/Matthew

- A. To say that Jesus was unorthodox would be an understatement. He simply did not act like any rabbi or teacher the Jews were familiar with. In these verses, Jesus calls a tax collector to be one of his disciples, which was unheard of among rabbis. Tax collectors weren't just disliked; they were despised. Tax collectors were representatives of the Roman governing authorities, and in the Jewish Talmud (one of their authoritative documents) tax collectors were lumped in with robbers and murderers, hardly the type one would usually choose to be a disciple. Levi was what was known as a "tax farmer" which gave him more opportunities to be dishonest than the income or poll tax collectors, so he was one of the worse kind. He might have been collecting the fish tax in Capernaum, which would have brought him into conflict with fishermen like Peter, as depicted in "The Chosen."
- B. We don't know how much contact Jesus had with Matthew before calling him to be a disciple, but Luke tells us when Jesus called him, he left everything to follow Jesus. Matthew shows his appreciation for Jesus choosing him as a disciple by throwing a party for Jesus at his house. Matthew invited some of his fellow tax collectors, but some Pharisees and rabbis were also present, and they were shocked and puzzled why Jesus would eat and socialize with "sinners and tax collectors." Interestingly, Jesus' response was taken from one of the Pharisees' own commentaries on portions of the book of Exodus called the *Mekilta*. He said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance." Given the ministry of John the Baptist which was so widely known, and which emphasized the need for *all* to repent and be baptized, the Pharisees should have recognized that Jesus' statement included them among the sinners who needed to repent, but they did not, and they will continue to hound Jesus all the way to the cross.

XXI. Luke 5:33-39 The question about fasting

- A. It's unclear whether these verses take place at Matthew's house or who the "they" are that are asking the question. But whoever they are, they see yet another unorthodoxy

in Jesus' ministry. They pointed out that the disciples of John the Baptist, as well as the Pharisees, often fast and pray, whereas Jesus' disciples "eat and drink." From the Pharisees point of view, this is a reasonable question. But Jesus' response puts the question in the proper perspective. At a wedding, you don't fast when the bride and groom are present; you enjoy a feast. So, while the bridegroom is present there will be no fasting. But later, when the bridegroom is no longer present, then there will be fasting. Although the Pharisees would not have fully appreciated Jesus' response, it is very practical. What is the purpose of fasting and prayer if not to better experience the presence of God? The primary purpose of fasting and prayer was irrelevant when Jesus, the Son of God, was there with them in person. When he is taken away, fasting and prayer would become purposeful once more.

- B. Jesus follows up his response with a parable to emphasize that a new day had arrived with respect to their relationship with God. The kingdom of God had arrived, and all things would be made new. To make this point, he reminded them that you can't patch an old garment with a piece of new cloth; it would tear the garment. Likewise, you can't put new wine in old wineskins. As the new wine fermented, it would burst the old wineskins. Jesus' point was that a new relationship with God had arrived, and the old orthodoxy—the old practices and beliefs—would not work for the new covenant; the new covenant would require new practices and a new orthodoxy; you can't just tack it on to the old ways.

- C. Verse 39 is somewhat puzzling; it seems to contradict what he has just said in the parable. However, this comment is addressed to the Pharisees, and it is an ironic statement, but one that was very pertinent to them. Jesus was actually quoting an old proverb that said, "The old is better." The Pharisees preferred the old wine; indeed, their entire lives were structured around strict obedience to the old wine—the Mosaic law. As we will see throughout Jesus' ministry, they clung desperately to their own interpretation of Mosaic law no matter what Jesus said or did. They didn't desire any of the "new wine" that Jesus offered; instead, they said, "The old way is good." And they almost always opposed Jesus.

- A. In these verses we have two more examples of Jesus bringing a new orthodoxy, this time over what was permissible on the sabbath. The first story involves what his disciples did. It was a sabbath and they were hungry. So, as they passed a grain field—probably wheat—they helped themselves to some of the grain, rubbed the heads of the grain together in their hands and ate them. The issue here was not whether they stole someone else’s grain. The law allowed someone to collect grain from a stranger’s field so long as a sickle wasn’t used. The issue was that they rubbed their hands together with the grain so they could eat it, and the act of rubbing their hands together was considered work by the Pharisees. It was the sabbath, so they had violated it by working, and Jesus had not rebuked his disciples for working on the sabbath. So, the Pharisees confronted Jesus. He responded by referencing an incident in the life of David. You may remember from our study of David that in I Samuel 21, David and his companions were fleeing from Saul and had no food. David approached the priest Ahimelech, asking for bread. The only bread available was the consecrated bread that only the priests were permitted to eat. But after David assured him his men had kept themselves from women—a requirement the priests had to follow before eating the consecrated bread—he gave the bread to David. The point Jesus made, which was illustrated by that story, was human need takes precedence over ritual observance of the law.
- B. Jesus goes on to make a statement that would have absolutely gobsmailed them. He said, “The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.” Remember, referring to himself as the Son of Man was an indirect way of saying he was the Messiah as prophesied in Daniel. And as such, he was lord over the sabbath with the authority to determine what was permissible and what was not on the sabbath. It’s difficult to imagine a more shocking statement that could be made to a Pharisee. And their opposition to him was just ratcheted up another couple of notches.
- C. The next story also demonstrates Jesus’ new orthodoxy. He was teaching in a synagogue on the sabbath, and there was a man present with a withered hand. Given Jesus’ reputation as a healer, the scribes and Pharisees there were interested primarily in whether Jesus would heal the man that day, which they believed would be a violation of the sabbath because healing was “work,” and that would give them grounds to bring charges against Jesus. He knew what they were thinking, and he called the man to come stand beside them. Jesus then addressed the scribes and

Pharisees directly, asking, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or destroy it?” This was a question they refused to answer, and Mark’s gospel tells us Jesus “looked around at them with anger, grieved at the hardness of heart.” He then told the man to stretch out his hand, and as he did so, his hand was fully healed. Luke tells us that the scribes and Pharisees were “filled with fury.” The original Greek for this verse could also be interpreted as “filled with senseless rage.” This compassionate healing led them to begin discussing what they could do to get rid of Jesus, who challenged their old orthodoxy. They were simply unwilling to consider they may be wrong about their interpretation of the law regarding the sabbath despite the plain evidence before them that Jesus healed the man by the power of the same God who delivered the law to the Israelites. It’s a sad commentary on human nature and an especially sad commentary on the Pharisees who claimed to be doing the will of God.

XXIII. Luke 6:12-16 Jesus chooses the twelve apostles

- A. Although Luke has previously told us of Jesus going to solitary places for extended prayer, this is the first time he tells us Jesus spent the entire night in prayer. It appears he was preparing himself for the selection of the men who would become his apostles, and he was preparing himself for the Sermon on the Plain which would immediately follow. If even Jesus needed an extended time of prayer before these two consequential events, how much more do we need sincere prayer before significant events in our own lives.

- B. Following the night of prayer, Jesus called his disciples together to announce who would become his apostles—those who would be the equivalent of ambassadors for a monarch, having the authority to speak on behalf of their king. We don’t know how many disciples were present for the announcement, but in chapter 10 Jesus commissioned 70 disciples to go ahead of him into the communities as he headed to Jerusalem for the final time. So, it’s likely there were more than 70 disciples present.

- C. Choosing twelve apostles was significant in view of Israel’s history—there were twelve tribes; now there are twelve apostles. And they were an unlikely group to be Jesus’ representatives by any human standard. None of them came from the well educated or powerful sectors of society; indeed, they included a tax collector and at

least one was a Zealot, a sect that specifically included assassination as the preferred way to rid Israel of its oppressors. Yet these unlikely men were who Jesus chose to not only preserve his teaching but also to proclaim his gospel throughout the world, apparently without a plan B in case these chosen ones failed in their assigned commission. So, let's review who they were.

- D. Simon Peter is always first in any list of the apostles. He was a fisherman and Jesus' best friend on earth. He may have been a relative of Jesus. His brother Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist. James and his brother John were partners with Peter in the fishing business. They were nicknamed "Sons of Thunder" by Jesus because they wanted Jesus to call fire from heaven down on a Samaritan town that wouldn't accept Jesus. Together with Peter, they were part of the inner three. Phillip was from Bethsaida, and he had also been a disciple of John the Baptist until Jesus found him and told him to "Follow me," as John's gospel records. Bartholomew is an apostle we know nothing about. There's something comforting for us in that. We can be an important part of God's work even though people may not even know who we are. Matthew was a tax collector, a group that was universally despised in Israel; they were considered traitors. Yet, he wrote the first gospel. Thomas is known as "doubting Thomas" because in John 20 he said he wouldn't believe Jesus had arisen from the grave unless he saw him for himself, but he also challenged his fellow apostles to follow Jesus to Lazarus' house in an area where the Jewish leaders could arrest Jesus, telling them "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (John 11:16). James, the son of Alphaeus, is another we know little about, but he also was in the upper room in the book of Acts, waiting for the Father's promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Simon the Zealot was a member of the terrorist political party. The fact Jesus brought this Simon together with Matthew is truly remarkable. Judas the son of James was also known as Thaddeus. In John 14:22, he asks Jesus why he was revealing himself to them and not to the rest of the world. Last of all is Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. After Jesus is crucified, he tried to give back the money to the chief priest, then killed himself.
- E. They were an unlikely lot indeed. But by their obedience to Jesus—with one exception—and under the power of the Holy Spirit, they changed the world.

XXIV. Luke 6:17-26 The Sermon on the Plain

- A. When Jesus comes down the mountain after appointing the twelve apostles, he finds a large crowd awaiting him. But before delivering the “Sermon on the Plain,” Luke tells us Jesus healed the sick and drove out the unclean spirits, and the crowd was pressing in on him to touch him and be healed. In other words, it was a typical crowd surrounding Jesus, although a somewhat larger one. Once he begins to teach, Luke makes clear that Jesus directed it to his disciples, although the crowd could hear it as well. The Sermon on the Plain is similar to the Sermon on the Mount, and there is no way we can address it in depth in the time available to us on Sunday mornings in our study of Luke. However, for a more detailed study of the Sermon on the Plain, I highly recommend “The Christian Manifesto” by Alastair Begg, available on Amazon. Also, since the Sermon on the Plain is so similar, although not identical, to the Sermon on the Mount you may find my book, “Core Values for the Young—and not so Young Christian” to be helpful. Both can be found on Amazon.
- B. The sermon begins with a list of blessings and woes, which was a common form of rabbinic teaching. However, Jesus’ list of blessings and woes was unlike anything they had ever heard. The poor were assumed to be poor because they were cursed by God. But Jesus said they were blessed. Jesus is not saying they were blessed *because* of their poverty; he is saying that their poverty is not a sign of God’s displeasure with them; God loves them in the midst of their poverty. Indeed, it is those who recognize the poverty of their spirit that will find the kingdom of God. Likewise, those who are hungry due to their poverty are not cursed by God; he blesses them in the midst of their hunger. And those who hunger for God and his presence in their lives will be filled.
- C. In the middle of the blessings is an even more unexpected one; Jesus pronounces his blessing on those who weep. Often those who weep feel cut off from God as if there is a barrier between them that they cannot cross. But Jesus blesses them. Jesus will cross that barrier with a bridge built by his own tears which will enable those who are weeping to move from despair to hope. Their tears are a testimony to the painful honesty that confession demands, and they are blessed because they recognize the depth of their sin and allow their hearts to be broken by it. Rather than condemning

them, Jesus blesses those who weep because their tears are evidence of what God wants most from us—a broken and contrite heart, as Psalm 51 confirms.

- D. Jesus also turns the world's values upside down by telling them you are blessed when you are hated, excluded, reviled, or defamed because you have chosen to follow him. No one likes being treated like that, but in Jesus' world it is grounds for rejoicing because it means we are actually being transformed into the kind of people God designed us to be. Jesus says we are being treated as the prophets often were, and our reward in heaven will be great. That is grounds for rejoicing, not despair.

XXV. Luke 6:27-36 Love for enemies

- A. These verses go to the heart of how different Christians are to live compared to the rest of the world. Compare these verses to what John the Baptist taught. Under the old covenant, John taught, "Be good; do better; stop cheating." This was the old way, based primarily on our own efforts to please God by adhering to the law. Jesus is ushering in the new way. We are to love not only our friends and family; we are to love even our enemies. No one had ever taught that before. Lest you think Jesus taught that we should have loving *feelings* for our enemies, the word for love he used was *agape*. Agape love is characterized by benevolence or goodwill. It is an act of the will rather than an act of the heart. After setting out the standard we think of as an impossible one—loving our enemies—he gives seven examples of what that might look like. Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who mistreat you. Offer someone who strikes you on the cheek with the other cheek. Give your shirt to the person who steals your coat. Give to whoever asks. Treat your enemies as you would want to be treated. Why does Jesus want us to live this way? Because this is how God treats everyone, even those who despise him or believe he doesn't even exist. As God's children, he expects us to be like him in our character.
- B. In short, Jesus is saying that God wants us to live very differently from the rest of the world. He points out that if we love someone who loves us, that is no different from the rest of the world; even hard-core sinners do that. The rest of the world uses a tit-for-tat standard for dealing with others, good for good and evil for evil. That standard is not acceptable to Jesus because it is not the standard God applies to sinners. Stop

and think about that; these are some of the most wonderful words Jesus ever spoke. God is merciful and loving to us even when we don't deserve it. If we want to be his disciples, we must learn to love as God loves. We won't do it perfectly, but this is the standard which God expects of us.

- C. Although this is a high and difficult standard of behavior for us, note that Jesus says if we do it, our reward will be great. We will be living as children of the Most High, God our Father. He is kind and merciful to the ungrateful and the wicked, and he expects us to be also.

XXVI. Luke 6:37-49 How to build your house in the kingdom

- A. It's helpful to work our way back through this passage. Jesus compares two house builders to paint a picture of how we can prepare ourselves for what lies ahead in life. Like a builder who builds a strong foundation for his house, we must build a strong foundation for living in the kingdom of God. How do we do that? We must listen to the words of Jesus, and then we must incorporate his words into how we live our lives. In other words, we must obey his commandments. The one who refuses to hear Jesus' words, or hears them but doesn't obey him, is like the man who builds a house without a firm foundation. When the storms come—and they will definitely come—the house without a firm foundation will be destroyed, whereas the house with a firm foundation will stand.

- B. So, how is the firm foundation built? We are not to judge others or condemn them. We must be forgiving towards others, just as our Father is forgiving of us. We must also be generous with others, for the measure by which we give is the measure by which we will receive. Although we are not to judge, we must be discerning as to what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. The Holy Spirit will aid us in such discernments.

- C. Jesus offers several parables or examples to emphasize his points. A blind person cannot guide another blind person; they will both fall into a ditch. We can't ignore

the words of Jesus if we expect our foundation to be strong, and we should never allow ourselves to be guided by someone who ignores or rejects his words. With respect to being judgmental or condemning someone else, we need to get our own house in order before we begin pointing out their faults to someone else. Jesus says we should get the log out of our own eye before pointing out the speck in our neighbor's eye.

- D. Jesus also provides a guide for us to see how well we are internalizing his teaching. A good tree doesn't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree doesn't produce good fruit. So, if the fruit of our lives is bad, we know that we haven't internalized Jesus words, and we must repent and be obedient. You can also think of your heart as a storeroom. If your heart is good, then good things will come out of the storeroom. But if your heart is evil, what comes out will be evil. And what comes out of our mouths reflects what is in the storeroom—our heart.

- E. We need to seriously consider Jesus' words in this chapter. None of us wants our life to count for nothing. With God's help, we can let Jesus' words seep into the core of our being so that we will avoid being judgmental, avoid falling into the proverbial ditch, or avoid producing bad fruit. We can be a source of hope and encouragement for a world that sorely needs it today. Jesus wants us to be God's children, treating the world the same way he treats us. When we learn to do that, we will begin to see fundamental change in our church, in our communities, and in our country.

XXVII. Luke 7:1-10 Jesus heals a centurion's servant

- A. When Jesus finished the Sermon on the Plain, he returned to Capernaum. Once there, some of the Jewish leaders came to Jesus telling him a Roman centurion has a slave who was gravely ill, and they asked Jesus to heal him. There are several things remarkable about this request. First, they are acting on behalf of a Roman soldier—and a centurion at that—a commander of 100 soldiers. The Romans were despised by the Jews, especially Roman soldiers. But this one was different. He was what is known as a "God fearer," a Gentile who worshiped the God of Israel but who had not submitted to all aspects of the law, including circumcision. He had shown his

commitment to God and his love for the people by building the synagogue in Capernaum for them. Hence, the Jews were willing to make this request for him.

- B. The second thing that was remarkable about this request was that it was for a slave. Romans were notorious for being the cruelest slave owners in history. Slaves had no rights whatsoever under Roman law; they were treated no better—and often worse—than domestic animals. One Roman matron had her female slave killed simply because she didn't like the way the slave had fixed her hair. This slave, however, had a kind master who valued him, and made the unusual request to the Jewish leaders to have the itinerant teacher and healer come heal his slave, who probably was Jewish. Note that the Jewish leaders told Jesus the centurion was *worthy* and therefore he should honor the request. Jesus honors their request and heads to the centurion's house to heal the slave.
- C. This is when the most remarkable thing about this healing occurs. It appears the centurion is both surprised and humbled that Jesus would come to his house to heal the slave. Remember, it was forbidden for any Jew to enter the home of a Gentile. A Jew became unclean by entering the home of a Gentile, who was by definition a sinner. So, once he is advised that Jesus was on his way, the centurion sends friends to carry a message to Jesus. He acknowledges he is unworthy for Jesus to enter his house, but he asks Jesus to merely say the word and his slave will be healed. We have seen all the people that have been amazed by Jesus in the first six chapters of Luke; now it is Jesus' turn to be amazed. The Jews had told Jesus the centurion was *worthy*, but the centurion acknowledges that he is *unworthy*. Furthermore, he understands authority, and he recognizes that Jesus has it, and he can heal the slave without even entering the centurion's house. The Roman centurion understood what even the Jewish clergy did not—he could ask for what he did not deserve and had no right to expect from Jesus, but he had the faith to realize he would receive it anyway. Jesus was amazed and said that he had not seen such faith even in Israel. When the friends returned to the centurion's home, they found the slave healed.

XXVIII. Luke 7:11-17 Jesus raises the widow's son at Nain

- A. Only Luke tells the story of the widow of Nain. She is a widow who has just lost her only son. In this story we see once again how Luke told the stories of the outcast and

marginalized, and no group in the first century was more marginalized than women, and widows even more so.

- B. In my mind's eye I see Jesus approaching the city of Nain. Behind him are his disciples, and behind them is a large crowd following him. As he approaches the city, a funeral procession is coming out of the city. As was customary at the time, the widow would have been at the head of the funeral procession, with the open casket behind her, and Luke tells us that a large crowd from the city was following her and the casket. So, Jesus and the woman come face to face, with a large crowd behind each of them just outside the city.

- C. Luke tells us Jesus has compassion on her. Perhaps that compassion was heightened because his own mother was a widow at this time; Joseph had died some years earlier. And within the next year or two, Jesus knew his own mother would be grieving the death of her oldest son.

- D. When he reaches the woman, he says, "Don't cry." And then, Jesus goes to the open coffin and directs his next words to the dead son. I see Jesus touching his hand and saying, "Young man, get up." You can imagine the shock when the young man not only gets up from his own casket but begins to speak! Interestingly, the first response of the crowd was fear. That seems to be the first response throughout scripture when humans encounter the power of God. But that response was followed immediately by both crowds glorifying God and recognizing that God has looked favorably on his people. Many healings, such as the healing of the centurion's slave, took place after a profession of faith by the one healed or a friend or family. For this healing, however, there was no such profession, only the compassion of our loving savior who redeemed a grieving mother's life and restored life to her son.

XXIX. Luke 7:18-35 Messengers from John the Baptist

- A. What is surprising about this story is that Luke tells us John's disciples reported all of the healings from this chapter to John—and perhaps the Sermon on the Plain and a

list of Jesus' disciples—before sending two of his disciples to ask Jesus whether he was “the one to come, or do we have to wait for another?” Given all the miraculous acts by Jesus, we can hardly be blamed for wondering why John would ask this question. After all, he had known Jesus from the womb, had proclaimed him the “lamb of God,” and had quoted Old Testament prophecies over Jesus. Why has this doubt entered his mind?

- B. The reason for his doubt is most likely the fact that not all prophecies from the Old Testament foretold a suffering savior. Malachi 4:1, for example, says, “See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.” That prophecy and others had convinced the Jews that when the Messiah came, he would drive out the Romans, and he would sit on the throne of King David to restore the fortunes of Israel. Jesus had performed many miracles and healings, but he had not yet taken any steps to establish himself as the earthly king of Israel and force the Romans out. John is confused because the unorthodox nature of Jesus' ministry was unexpected, and from jail he had begun to question whether Jesus' role was that of the Messiah. In short, Jesus had failed to meet his expectations, and he wanted to know whether he had misunderstood who Jesus was. At this point he had no understanding that Jesus would have to go to the cross and be raised from the dead to fulfill his mission.
- C. Jesus doesn't respond directly to John's question; instead, he tells the two disciples to go and report to John what they have just seen: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them,” quoting Isaiah 35. And he gently tells them to remind John that, “blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”
- D. Once John's disciples leave to convey Jesus' answer, Jesus tells the crowd how great John is. He is the one who would pave the way for the coming of the Messiah, again quoting Malachi. Furthermore, among those born of women, no one was greater than John. But in an indirect rebuke to the Pharisees and scribes, who had refused to be baptized by John, he quoted a children's song. In effect, he was saying, probably

sadly, that, “They wanted us to dance to their tune. They thought we would weep to their sad songs. But John and I don’t dance to your tune.”

XXX. Luke 7:36-50 A sinful woman forgiven

- A. This story is one of the most powerful in all the New Testament, and it encapsulates Jesus entire ministry in some ways. It is a piercing parable that goes to the heart of the issue Jesus was addressing, and it dramatically presents the issue of what God expects of us sinners as we seek reconciliation with God. Jesus’ words also point out that the self-righteous—although they may go to extreme lengths to avoid sin—may miss the whole point of Jesus’ message.
- B. To understand this story, we have to set the stage. Jesus has received an invitation from Simon, a prominent Pharisee, to dinner at his house. From the context of the story, we can conclude that the invitation was not because he admired Jesus, but because he wanted to check him out and perhaps find grounds to criticize him, or worse. This is confirmed by the fact Jesus was not offered the common courtesies offered to guests. It was clearly a snub, but it wound up embarrassing the host rather than Jesus. The guests and host would have been gathered around a low three-sided table, but they would not have been seated as we would be today. They were reclining on pillows, propping themselves up on their left elbow, while feeding themselves with their right hand. Somehow, a woman shows up who is identified as a sinner and comes to stand behind where Jesus is reclining at the table. From the context, it’s clear that everyone in the room knows this woman is a sinner, and in my imagination, I see the hum of conversation around the table coming to a halt as everyone inwardly says, “What is *that* woman doing here?” She ignores the others in the room as she begins to weep, and then she did something that would have scandalized all present, except Jesus. She let down her hair to dry his feet which she was washing with her tears. A woman letting down her hair in public like that would have been the equivalent today of a woman removing her blouse and exposing her breasts. It was that big a deal. Once she had dried his feet, she kissed them and then anointed his feet with an extravagantly expensive oil, the aroma of which filled the room. The host Pharisee is disgusted by the woman, and it confirms his opinion that Jesus isn’t a true prophet because, in his opinion, no true prophet would allow a sinner to touch him. Of course, he doesn’t say that out loud; he muttered it to

himself, but the look on his face would have revealed his judgmental opinion. The tension in the room would have been thick enough to cut.

- C. Jesus breaks the silence by telling Simon he has something to say to him. Jesus has the attention of everyone in the room by now, as all eyes are fixed on Jesus and the woman, and all present are wondering how this is going to play out. Jesus then tells Simon the parable of the two debtors, asking which would have loved the forgiving creditor more? The question answers itself; of course, the one who was forgiven more will love him more. Simon, the Pharisee, is not stupid; he knows the correct answer, and he would lose all credibility had he responded otherwise, so he reluctantly gives the right answer. I believe Simon knows where Jesus is going with this parable and the question Jesus asked him, but he is trapped by his own world view that valued ritual righteousness over a repentant heart. Jesus quickly confirms that he has answered correctly. Then Jesus, who had been reclining on his left elbow turns to look at the woman kneeling behind him but continues speaking to Simon. Jesus—in my view rather gently—compares how Simon had failed to extend to him all courtesies commonly offered to guests, while this woman, a sinner, had not stopped honoring Jesus with her tears and the perfume. This woman had been convicted of her sins because of Jesus; she recognized him for who he was, and she understood she could turn to him for forgiveness, whereas the Pharisee was unable to recognize who Jesus was or even the extent of his own sinfulness. In his pride, he saw himself as righteous before God, whereas he was dismissive of the sincere repentance of the sinner he saw before him in the person of this woman. What Jesus saw, however, was a woman who was a sinner—yes—but one with a broken and contrite heart who recognized that Jesus was from God and could deal with her sins. And that is why she loved so much. He told her, “Your sins are forgiven.”
- D. This statement created another stir among the guests who were mostly friends of the Pharisee. They asked one another who was this who purported to forgive sins. Jesus, aware of this, told the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” Once again, a person who you would not expect to understand who Jesus was, did understand, while someone whom you would expect to get it, did not.

- E. Lest we get too judgmental concerning the Pharisee, however, we must keep in mind that Jesus loved Simon as much as he loved the woman. He could have come down much harder on Simon than he did. And the purpose of telling him the parable was to open his eyes to his own need for forgiveness and his lack of love. Luke doesn't tell us whether Simon's eyes were opened, but we do know this much. After the resurrection, many Pharisees believed in Jesus and became part of the early church. Although we can't confirm it, I like to think that Simon was one of those Pharisees, and that he came to believe that he needed Christ's forgiveness every bit as much as the woman did.

XXXI. Luke 8:1-3 Some women accompany Jesus

- A. These verses point out once again how unusual Jesus' ministry was. He is on the road once more, and he is traveling throughout Galilee, bringing the good news of the gospel to the people. The twelve newly appointed apostles are with him, but so is another group that one would not expect to find traveling with a Jewish rabbi—a group of women. Luke tells us that these women are supporting Jesus and his disciples from their resources. It was not unheard of in that time for women to be supporters of a rabbi. However, it would have been somewhat scandalous for women to actually travel with a rabbi or teacher. Remember, rabbis, Pharisees, and priests would not even speak to a woman in public, so this just adds to the unorthodox nature of Jesus' ministry. Once more, Luke alone provides a description of the women who supported Jesus and were part of his traveling group.
- B. This was a diverse group of women who supported and traveled with Jesus. Luke tells us there were “some women” who had been healed and had been cured of evil spirits by Jesus. Mary Magdalene is singled out as a woman from whom seven demons had been exorcised. She is often portrayed in popular movies or books as a former prostitute, although scripture does not describe her as such. She became the first person to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection. Joanna was the wife of the steward of Herod Antipas, so she clearly would have been a woman of means. The third woman mentioned is Susanna, about whom we know virtually nothing except she had declared herself a follower of Jesus and helped support his ministry. That's not a bad resume to have. Luke says there were “many others,” about whom we also know nothing. These women are not mentioned again by Luke until they appear at

the cross when Jesus is being crucified, but they were ongoing supporters and encouragers of Jesus and his ministry.

XXXII. Luke 8:4-18 The parable of the sower

- A. Jesus is still in Galilee, and the crowds are growing, with people flocking to him from everywhere. This appears to be a time before he was routinely attacked by the Pharisees and scribes, and Jesus is teaching in parables. This parable is known as the parable of the sower, but the focus of the parable is on the condition of the soils on which the seeds are sown.
- B. As with most of scripture, background and context are important here. What is different from modern times is that in those days the seed was sown *before* the ground was plowed. The farmer would sow the seed and then work the seed into the ground with the plow. That's important to know so that no one believes the sower was careless with the seed. Jesus describes the seed falling in four places: on the path, in the rocks, among the thorn bushes, and on fertile ground. So, although only one-quarter of the seed wound up in good ground, it produced a hundred times what was sown. Having presented the parable, Jesus said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen." He is challenging his listeners to consider the parable to understand its meaning. And it was critically important that they come to understand the parable if they expected to be reconciled with God. Given the fact that even his own disciples didn't get the meaning it's probably safe to say no one else did either at that point. As we discussed at the beginning of our study, Jesus usually did not explain his parables to the crowds, which challenged them to search for the meaning. But in this case, the twelve are about to be sent on a mission (as we will see in chapter 9). So, they had to be prepared for what they will encounter on their mission. They will be the sowers, and Jesus wants them to know the different ways in which their message will be received.
- C. Jesus interprets the parable to his disciples by giving a human face to the four types of ground. The path on which the seed fell represents those who actually hear the word, but Satan comes and steals the seed, represented by the birds that eat the seed. The rocky ground represents those who hear and receive the word with joy, but they have no root and when the blistering sun of testing comes, they fall away. The seed that falls among the thorns represents those in whom the word sprouts, but the cares,

riches, and pleasures of life choke it to the point they bear no fruit. The good ground speaks of those who receive the word into their hearts, becoming honest and good; despite the cares and struggles of life, they hold on and endure, producing an abundance of fruit.

- D. Jesus' words in verses 16-18 sum up the main points he made in the parable. He has just lit the candle of light that reveals how the word of God is received by various people. What is obvious to some is a mystery to others. But Jesus has lit the candle and put it on a stand so *all* can see the light and see what kind of soil they are. Nothing is concealed that won't be revealed, and everything hidden will come to the light. Jesus wants everyone to come into the light of his message. God wants a loving relationship with everyone who will repent of their sins and commit to abiding in Jesus.

XXXIII. Luke 8:19-21 The true kindred of Jesus

- A. These verses, without explanation and context, make it appear that Jesus is being rather harsh where his mother and brothers are concerned in this story. But remember, in John 7:5 we are told that not even Jesus' brothers believed in him. Earlier in this chapter Jesus told his listeners, to paraphrase, "Take care how you listen; your life depends on it." Now, with his mother and brothers waiting outside, he emphasizes the point once more—even more strongly this time because of the central place family played in Jewish society. Jesus is saying that those who listen carefully have become his true family. Hearers only have become like his brothers who do not truly believe in him; doers have become like his mother who not only hears but believes. It was a shocking thing for Jesus to say, putting the family of faith before one's earthly family, and would have been hard for some to receive. But Jesus is making the point that our true family—our eternal family—is the family of faith joined in our submission to the Son of God.

XXXIV. Luke 8:22-25 Jesus calms a storm

- A. Jesus is still in Galilee, and the most prominent feature of that area is the large lake called the "Sea of Galilee." It isn't a sea; it's a lake through which the Jordan River flows, but perhaps it is called a sea because it is a large body of water. In these verses, Jesus and his disciples have set sail from the west side of the lake to the east

side, based on what the next verses say. As they are crossing the lake, a ferocious thunderstorm hits the boat, and the disciples are terrorized. They fear the boat is about to capsize. Jesus, however, remains asleep from exhaustion. When they reach the point of desperation, the disciples, realizing they are helpless against the storm, wake Jesus, and as Luke tells us, they shout at Jesus, saying, “We’re about to die.” Jesus wakes up, looks about and then with a word commands the wind and waves to be still, and they do! In a moment, the disciples have gone from—in their view—being on the verge of dying to sailing in calm waters. They are amazed, as we would be, too. But Luke says they were also fearful—not in fear of dying any longer, but in complete awe of the one who commands even the weather. They asked themselves, “Who is this that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?”

- B. There were so many awe-inspiring stories about Jesus that we may wonder why this story was included by Luke. After all, no one was healed of a disease or raised from the dead. But this story reveals in a different way how Jesus had control over not only disease, disfigurement, and death, but also over nature itself. It was important that Jesus’ disciples fully understand this. Soon, they would come to realize that even the tomb could not contain Jesus, but they did not yet have the faith to accept that. This event expanded their knowledge of who Jesus is, increasing their faith in him and their understanding of the power which he had. The question the disciples asked when Jesus calmed the storm is one which Luke will answer in detail over the next chapter in describing events which occurred just prior to Jesus setting out on his final trip to Jerusalem where he will face the cross.

XXXV. Luke 8:26-39 Jesus heals the demoniac

- A. This is one of the most unusual stories in the gospels. It occurs immediately after Jesus calmed the storm. Remember, when that event occurred Jesus and the disciples were on their way from the west side of the large lake called the Sea of Galilee to the east side, to an area called the Gerasenes, which was part of a larger area known as the Decapolis, a Gentile area. So, Jesus is no longer in Jewish territory but rather in Gentile territory. When they arrive at the shore, who should be there to meet Jesus but a demon-possessed madman who is stark naked. Luke provides colorful background about the man. He lived among the tombs, which would have made him unclean to any Jew. He had often been placed in chains and shackles, but he would break free from them and flee into the wilds. Mark’s gospel (chapter 5) tells us he

also would often cut himself with stones, another sign of demon possession. In short, he was a lunatic who was demon possessed and abhorrent to everyone.

- B. As Jesus steps off the boat, this crazed man falls at Jesus' feet and shouts at the top of his lungs for Jesus—whom he identifies as the Son of God—not to torment him. Jesus immediately identifies him as a demon-possessed man and asks the man what his name was. Note that it was the demons who responded through the man, saying their name was Legion, implying there were thousands of them. They begged Jesus not to send them into the abyss, a place specifically designated for Satan and his demons (Rev 20:1-3). There was a large heard of pigs nearby—which further identifies this as a Gentile area because the Jews never ate pork—and the demons pled with Jesus to allow them to enter the pigs. Jesus relents, and the demons enter the pigs, immediately driving the entire heard into the lake where they drowned.
- C. Put yourself in the shoes of the swineherders now. They had been watching over their herds when they saw Jesus arrive in the boat. They saw the crazed madman approach Jesus and engaged in a conversation with him which they probably couldn't hear, being too far away. The next thing they see is the madman pointing to their herd of pigs; Jesus nods his consent, and then the entire herd rushes down the hillside into the lake and drown. They would have been dumbfounded, probably fearful of the consequences of losing the herds they were responsible for, and in total awe of what they had just observed. Luke tells us they rushed off to the city to tell their masters and others what has just happened.
- D. Some critics have questioned why Jesus allowed the demons to enter the herd of pigs, leading to their destruction. The primary reason was most likely that this was a dramatic demonstration of what the ultimate goal of Satan and his demons is—to destroy life, to bring death. Had the demons remained in the man, he would have eventually been destroyed. Throughout the scriptures, the redemption of mankind has involved a sacrifice, usually that of lambs or pigeons, before Jesus made the final once-for-all-time sacrifice of himself. This time the sacrifice for the deranged man was the death of the pigs.

- E. When the people of the town arrived to investigate this unlikely story, they found the madman fully clothed and in his right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus. As we have seen before in Luke, when people are confronted with the power of God, it often generates great fear. Luke tells us all the people asked Jesus to leave them because they were filled with fear. Rather than celebrate the rebirth of this man of the tombs and submit to the one who had the power to dramatically change the man's life, they rejected Jesus and pleaded with him to depart.
- F. As Jesus was about to leave, the man begged Jesus to allow him to go with Jesus. His life had just been changed, rescued from the pits of hell, and he wanted to follow Jesus. But Jesus had a better plan for the man. He told him to go and declare how much God had done for him. Luke tells us that is exactly what the man did, becoming a missionary for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

XXXVI. Luke 8:40-56 A girl and a woman healed

- A. Jesus left the east side of the great lake to get away temporarily from the crowd. When he returns, the crowd is still there waiting for him. In this chapter we have already seen Jesus' power over nature, over demons, and now we will see his power over sickness and death. Among the crowd when their boat lands is a man named Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue, and therefore a man of influence. He falls at the feet of Jesus and asks him to go to his home to heal his twelve-year-old daughter who is dying. Jesus immediately agrees, and he and his disciples, with the crowd following, head for Jairus' house.
- B. The crowd is growing as they are on the way, and suddenly Jesus feels that power had gone out of him due to a healing, but he didn't know whom he had just healed. Jesus stopped and asked, "Who touched me?" Peter voiced what was on all the disciples' minds, "What do you mean? Everyone in the crowd is pressing in on you and touching you." But Jesus knew someone had touched him *in faith*, knowing she would be healed if she could just touch the fringe of his garment. As he looked around, a woman meekly approached, fell at his feet, and confessed she was the one who touched him. She told him she had been hemorrhaging for twelve years, which was not only a physical problem, it would have made her a social outcast, a person

who was unclean and unable to socialize with other people. She had spent all her money on doctors who were unable to help her, but now she announced to Jesus that she was healed; she could sense it in her own body. Jesus commends her faith and tells her to go in peace. We see in this episode how Jesus always responded to someone who approached him in faith, and it shows once more the power Jesus had to heal, even if he didn't know who he was healing at the time.

- C. Despite this being a remarkable example of Jesus' power and willingness to heal, you can imagine how impatient Jairus would have been as Jesus stopped to discover who was healed by touching him. As he listened to the healed woman describe all she had done previously to no avail, I picture Jairus becoming more desperate by the minute, fearing that Jesus won't reach his dying daughter in time. Confirming his fears, even as Jesus was telling the woman to go in peace, someone from Jairus' house arrived to inform him his daughter had died. You can imagine the mixed emotions Jairus had at that moment as his greatest fear had just come to pass. Although he had faith that Jesus could heal his daughter, he apparently didn't have faith that Jesus could raise her from the dead.
- D. Jesus, however, quickly reassures Jairus not to fear; only believe and she would be saved. When Jesus and the others arrived at Jairus' house, the professional mourners were already well into their role of weeping and wailing over the death of the girl, as was common in that culture for those who could afford to pay mourners. Jesus told the mourners she was not dead but asleep, and they scornfully laughed at Jesus. But he put them all out except the mother and father, and Peter, James, and John. Then Jesus took the dead girl by the hand and simply said, "Child, get up," whereupon she did, just as he had told the dead son at Nain to get up. Once more, Jesus demonstrated his power with a simple command, and even death had to obey.
- E. In one short chapter, Luke has demonstrated Jesus' power over nature, over the demonic, and over illness and death. To the question the disciples and others observing his powers asked—Who is this man?—Jesus has provided a lot for them to consider. These acts surely increased the faith of his disciples, preparing them for their first foray as Jesus' disciples, which we will discuss in the next chapter.

XXXVII. Luke 9:1-9 Mission of the Twelve/Herod's inquiry

- A. The time is drawing near for Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem and the cross. Before arriving at that critical moment, however, Jesus decides to send the apostles out to proclaim the gospel, heal the sick, and cast out the forces of evil, which will be their full-time job after the resurrection. He also wants to build their faith, for their mission would be impossible if they were not empowered by Jesus to carry out this mission. He also wants them to learn to rely totally on God as they evangelize. They are to take no provisions, no money, or other items one normally takes on a trip. They are to totally rely upon those to whom they bring the message to house and feed them, which will be a lesson in God's grace. They are not to go as beggars, however. If they are not welcome anywhere, they are to shake the dust off their feet as a testimony against the unbelievers who reject them.
- B. In chapter 8 the central question about Jesus was raised by the disciples: who is this man whom the wind and waves obey and whom even the demons obey? In this chapter, it is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who asks this question. He is perplexed because some are saying Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead, while others said he is one of the Old Testament prophets come back to life. Despite Herod's desire to see Jesus, he will not meet Jesus until Pontius Pilate sends Jesus to Herod during Jesus' trial in the Roman courts. So, people of all rungs of society were anxious to learn more about Jesus and understand who he might be. For some, the interest was just curiosity; for others, it was a quest to learn just who this man of God really was.

XXXVIII. Luke 9:10-17 Feeding the five thousand

- A. The twelve return, reporting to Jesus all they had seen and accomplished on their mission. Mark's gospel tells us it is about this time that John was beheaded, and Matthew tells us Jesus wanted to get away from the crowds for a time to be alone with the twelve. So, Jesus attempts to lead his disciples away for a time of R & R, but the crowds learn of it and follow them. What was supposed to be a time away to rest and prepare for what lies ahead turned into another demanding time for Jesus to teach and to heal. But Luke is clear that Jesus welcomed the crowd.

- B. As the end of the day approached, the disciples urged Jesus to dismiss the crowd so they could go into nearby towns and find food. Imagine their surprise when Jesus says, “You give them something to eat.” Just as Jesus’ challenged them by telling them to take no provisions on their recent foray, he is now challenging them to deal with what appears to be an impossible situation—feeding the crowd with little or no food available. After scrounging about, all they could come up with were five loaves of bread and two small fish, enough normally for only one, possibly two, people. Imagine their surprise once again when, despite the meager amount of food available, Jesus tells the disciples to have the people sit down in groups of fifty. Luke tells us 5,000 men were present, so the total number of people present probably numbered over 10,000. Although the disciples are unsure what Jesus intends to do, by now they had enough faith in him to follow Jesus’ instructions. After all, they had recently observed all of the miracles of the last few chapters and should have realized that nothing was impossible for Jesus. Jesus blessed the five loaves and two fish and began distributing to the disciples. They then served the people, and Luke tells us, “All ate and were filled.”
- C. But Luke tells us something more. When the disciples gathered the leftovers, there were twelve baskets of broken pieces. The baskets referred to here were just large enough for someone’s lunch. So, the meager lunch that John tells us came from a small boy was multiplied into enough to feed thousands with leftovers that would supply the disciples’ lunch the next day. This is one of the best-known stories about Jesus; people who have never darkened the door of a church have, nevertheless, heard of the feeding of the five thousand. It is another example of Jesus compassionately exercising his power in a way that will lead the disciples to the correct answer when Jesus asks them, “Who do you say I am?”

XXXIX. Luke 9:18-27 Peter’s declaration/Jesus foretells his death

- A. The question that has been hovering over the disciples during the last few chapters is now presented to them by Jesus himself. It is close to the time for the final journey to Jerusalem where the cross and a tomb await Jesus. It’s critical that they come to understand who he is and what his mission is. Jesus chooses a times when the

disciples are alone with him to pose the question. The first question is who do people say I am? He gets the same answer Herod got when he asked about Jesus—he was John raised from the dead, or an Old Testament prophet come back. But then Jesus asks the key question: “Who do *you* say I am?” It was time to confront the disciples with the question which they all must be able to answer before Jesus faces the cross. As was usually the case, Peter, the leader among the disciples, responds for them all. “You are the Messiah of God.”

- B. Although Jesus finally has the answer he wants from his disciples, he now must teach them what that means. Remember, the disciples, like all Jews at the time, expected the Messiah to be a warrior like David who would drive out the occupying Romans and restore Israel to its former glory among the nations. To their dismay and lack of understanding, he tells them that he must suffer, be rejected by the Jewish leaders, be put to death, but then be raised on the third day. We know the disciples didn’t understand this because not one of them expected Jesus to arise from the grave after his crucifixion. He goes on to say that anyone who wants to be his follower must be ready to take up his cross daily and follow him. He told them they (and we) must be ready to lose their life for his sake. We must never be ashamed of Jesus or his gospel, or Jesus will be ashamed of us on judgment day. These would have been hard words for them to hear—even as they are difficult for us to hear—but Jesus is letting them know what lies ahead for himself and for them and that he expects a total commitment from his disciples.

- C. Jesus ends this episode by telling them that some standing there with him would not see death before they see the kingdom of God. That promise will be fulfilled when Peter, James, and John accompany Jesus to the mountain top where they will observe the transfiguration.

XL. Luke 9:28-36 The transfiguration

- A. Luke tells us eight days have passed since the episode where Peter confessed Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus asks Peter, James, and John to accompany him as they go up the mountain where Jesus intends to pray. Once Jesus begins to pray, his countenance changes. His face and his clothes become dazzling white, and two men appear—who

also were glorified, which means they also were dazzling white—and they begin talking to Jesus about his forthcoming departure which will take place in Jerusalem. Somehow from the conversation the disciples are able to identify the two men as Moses and Elijah. Luke provides the interesting comment that the disciples were “weighed down with sleep” but had managed to stay awake to see Jesus’ glorified state and the two men. I gather from this that they were nodding off, but remained awake enough to clearly see something that would have amazed, confused, and bewildered them. From the disciples’ subsequent actions, it’s clear they did not then understand what Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were talking about regarding Jesus’ departure—which was a reference to his death on the cross.

- B. As the two men are about to depart from Jesus, Peter speaks up, “It’s good to be here, let’s build a tabernacle or dwelling place for you, Moses, and Elijah.” Luke tells us—probably from interviews with Peter himself—that Peter was just babbling, not realizing what he was saying, probably because he was so in awe of what they saw and heard. Just as Peter says this, a cloud slowly envelops all of them, and Luke tells us the disciples were terrified. At this point, they had no idea what was going on, and despite being with Jesus they were apparently afraid for their lives. Then, a voice from the cloud said, “This is my son, the beloved; listen to him.” If there were any doubts remaining in the minds of Peter, James, and John as to who Jesus was, this should have removed them. The voice called Jesus, “my Son, the beloved.”
- C. Once the voice had spoken, the cloud rolled away—the cloud that had prevented them from seeing the face of God. As God told Moses, “No one shall see my face and live.” (Ex 33:20), so God protected the disciples even as he was speaking to them from the cloud. When the cloud passed, they were again alone with Jesus, no longer in his glorified state. As Matthew tells us, Jesus instructed them to tell no one what they had seen until he had been raised from the dead, another instruction from Jesus that they failed to understand until later. However, Luke tells us they didn’t tell anyone until later, perhaps because they were so in awe of what they had seen and heard, or perhaps they didn’t think anyone would believe them anyway.

D. So, what happened here? Clearly, Jesus was continuing to reveal to his closest disciples who he was. The task Jesus would assign to them in the Great Commission following his resurrection was so daunting and so difficult that he had to have his disciples fully prepared and totally committed to him. That full preparation wouldn't be accomplished until after his resurrection, but this was necessary preparation for that day. We know that Jesus was fully man, but he was also fully God. For that brief time on the mountain, the veil of Jesus' humanity was pulled back so that the three disciples could see Jesus' divine nature in an unmistakable way. This event was still in the forefront of Peter's mind when he wrote II Peter nearly four decades later, telling his readers that he had personally observed the honor and glory given to Jesus by the Father on the mount of transfiguration. (II Peter 1:16-18). Why did Jesus not want them to tell anyone what they had seen? The time for such revelations to all had not yet come. Jesus still had more to accomplish before the cross, and if this event were proclaimed publicly, his arrest and death would likely have occurred much sooner.

XLI. Luke 9:37-43 A healing/Jesus foretells his death/True greatness

A. Upon coming down from the mountain, Jesus encounters another crowd, and from the crowd a man shouts to Jesus that his son is possessed by a demon and that Jesus' disciples (the twelve minus Peter, James, and John) had been unable to heal him. Jesus' response reveals his frustration with the situation, with his frustration seemingly addressed more toward his own disciples than to the man whose son was possessed. Why so? In recent days, the disciples had seen miracle after miracle. Furthermore, Jesus had sent the twelve out on a mission that by all accounts was very successful. They had healed the sick and cast out demons, along with proclaiming the gospel. Now, however, their faith wasn't up to the task of exorcising the demon from this young boy. Jesus, although frustrated with them, tells the father to bring the son to him. As the boy approached Jesus, the demon convulsed him again in one last attack, but Jesus rebuked the demon and presented the healed boy to his father. Luke tells us all were astounded at the greatness of God.

B. Immediately after healing the boy, Jesus speaks to his disciples alone and tells them once again that he would be betrayed into the hands of men—which meant, at least, that he would be arrested. Luke tells us the disciples didn't understand what he was saying; the meaning was concealed from them. They were so certain of what they

understood the role of the Messiah to be that they simply couldn't make any sense of what Jesus was telling them. And what Jesus was telling them did not line up at all with what they expected the Messiah would do—become Israel's king and chase out the Romans, restoring Israel as a great nation, with the disciples as his closest advisers. Luke tells us they were afraid to ask Jesus what he meant, perhaps fearful the answer would be one they didn't want to hear.

- C. Evidence that this is exactly what the disciples were thinking comes in verses 46-48. They were arguing among themselves about who was the greatest. In effect, they were arguing over who would have the choicest positions in the court of King Jesus once he announced publicly that he was the Messiah and was anointed by God to be the king of Israel. Jesus quickly attempts to tamp down such thoughts by putting a small child in their midst and telling them the least among them will be the greatest, not the person who achieves some imagined position in an earthly kingdom. As we will see, this concept doesn't sink in with the disciples until after Pentecost. Luke informs us in Acts 1:6 that the disciples asked Jesus if now was the time when he would restore the kingdom to Israel. This wasn't a spiritual kingdom—the church—they were anticipating; it was an earthly kingdom, but one whose king was Jesus. Only after Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit did they begin to understand what the kingdom Jesus promised would be.
- D. Verses 49 and 50 appear to be an example of the disciples wanting to limit who could minister in the name of Jesus to the twelve or perhaps to the seventy, whom we will learn about in the next chapter. Someone not an immediate disciple of Jesus was casting out demons in the name of Jesus and the disciples tried to stop him. Jesus rebuffed John saying whoever is not against you is for you.

XLII. Luke 9:51-62 The final journey begins

- A. A momentous event takes place in these verses, but it is mentioned so subtly that it is easy to miss it. Luke tells us the time was fast approaching for Jesus to face the cross in Jerusalem, and that, "He set his face to go to Jerusalem." The entire remainder of the gospel of Luke consists of the final trip to Jerusalem, the events there, and the post-resurrection stories.

- B. As Jesus and his disciples are on their way, he sent messengers ahead to make preparations for him in a Samaritan town. Unlike the reception he received in the fourth chapter of John, this Samaritan city didn't receive him because he was on his way to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Remember, there was enmity between the Jews and Samaritans. James and John, in particular, took umbrage at the rejection and asked Jesus if they should command fire to come down from heaven to wipe out the Samaritan town. Their reaction was undoubtedly a big disappointment to Jesus. After all, they had heard Jesus teach that they should love their enemies and do good to those who abuse them. Furthermore, Jesus had previously given instructions on what to do if they were rejected—shake the dust off their feet and move on. But that wasn't enough for James and John; they wanted to retaliate, the opposite of what Jesus taught. Jesus rebuked them and, perhaps humorously, gave them the nickname “Sons of Thunder,” according to the gospel of Mark.
- C. The final verses of this chapter present Jesus responding to three different men who at least express some interest in becoming a follower of Jesus. The first man says he will follow Jesus wherever he goes. From the context it appears perhaps this man thought, as the disciples did, that Jesus would become the king of Israel. Jesus' response lets him know the path ahead was difficult and far from the life of a king's court. Luke doesn't tell us the man's response, but it appears he didn't become a follower. The second man responds to Jesus' invitation to follow him by saying he must bury his father first. Most biblical scholars interpret this to mean the man's father was still alive and the man was saying once his father died and he received his inheritance he would follow Jesus. Just as Jesus told the crowd who told him his mother and brothers were outside waiting for him in chapter 8, Jesus tells this man his faith family comes first, and he should go now and proclaim the kingdom of God. The third man says he will follow Jesus but wants to go say goodbye to those at home. Jesus tells him once you have committed to the kingdom of God, you can't look back to the old life. Again, this is consistent with giving God first priority.

XLIII. Luke 10:1-24 The mission of the seventy

- A. Jesus is still on the road to Jerusalem; his followers at this point include more than just the twelve. In these verses, Jesus commissions seventy to undertake a foray similar to the one undertaken by the twelve earlier. (In some versions of the Bible,

Jesus sends out 72 at this point, but the number is inconsequential for our purposes). The instructions given to the seventy are basically the same as given to the twelve; they are not to take provisions with them but rather are to rely upon those to whom they bring their message and healing. Though these are not called apostles, they, nevertheless, speak on behalf of Jesus. He told them, “Whoever listens to you listens to me,” and vice versa. Jesus also is blunt about the consequences to the towns that reject the message being brought to them. He said that if the deeds done in the named Jewish towns had been performed in the pagan towns of Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented. It is another example of the theme we have seen throughout Luke. Those that should have understood often did not, and those who are not expected to understand often did. And the consequences of their response will be significant. It’s a message we need to heed. Jesus is always ready to forgive, but refusal to repent has its consequences for Jew and Gentile alike.

- B. From the text it appears that the mission of the seventy was even more successful than the mission of the twelve. They returned with stories of how even demons submitted to them. Jesus shares in their joy and mentions a memory that is all his own. He says, “I watched Satan fall from heaven,” an event recorded in Isaiah 14:12-15. He reminds them that he had given them power over the forces of evil, but their rejoicing should be over the fact their names were written in heaven.
- C. This event is a high point in the trip to Jerusalem which will have many low points along the way as Jesus heads toward the cross. Luke tells us Jesus, “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit.” He thanked his Father for revealing to the unlearned what the wise and intelligent have refused to accept. The wise and learned were so wrapped up in their own interpretation of scripture that they were unable recognize the Son when he stood before them. And they were unable to truly know the Father because they had refused to know the Son.
- D. This was such a significant event that Jesus told his disciples how blessed they were to see the events which they saw. All the Old Testament prophets and kings longed to see what they were seeing and hear what they were hearing but did not have the opportunity they had. We share in that blessing because all of these events which the

disciples experienced have been recorded for us in scripture. We now know precisely how God revealed himself in Jesus, something the Old Testament believers could only speculate about. It's a blessing we should always treasure.

XLIV. Luke 10:25-37 The parable of the Good Samaritan

- A. One of the themes we have seen repeatedly in Luke is that those whom you would expect to understand usually do not, while those whom you would not expect to understand often do. Nowhere is that theme more prominent than in this story. The scene opens with an expert in the law posing a question to Jesus not to gain understanding but rather to test Jesus. The question is a fundamental one: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus turns the question back on him, probably because the man was an expert in the law. Jesus' question to him was, "How do *you* understand what the law requires?" As an expert in the law, the lawyer understood what the law required, and he gave the correct answer. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as your self." Jesus commends the man for his correct answer, telling him, "Do this and you will live."
- B. But the lawyer isn't ready to give up on testing Jesus and asks, "Who is my neighbor?" There is history behind this question, and it's a loaded question. The law included Leviticus 19:18, which says, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The scribes and Pharisees—the experts in the law—assumed and taught that the neighbor they were to love as themselves was a fellow Jew. A fellow Jew was not an enemy, even if there were disagreements with him. Thus, the obligation to love one's neighbor as himself was limited to one who was of the same race and religion. The law was silent, they reasoned, with regard to enemies, so one was free to hate one's enemies. Thus, the commandment to love one's neighbor as himself found in the law had morphed into, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." This is the background for the lawyer's question to Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?"
- C. Rather than engage in an abstract debate over the definition of "neighbor," Jesus goes right into the parable. He sets the stage by saying "A man was going down from

Jerusalem to Jericho.” The man was presumably a Jew. He fell among thieves who robbed and beat him, leaving him half dead. This was a plausible story because this route was notorious for putting travelers in danger, particularly if traveling alone. The first person to see the man was a priest who passed by on the other side. The second was a Levite—one who assisted in temple sacrifices. Both of them were men who should have “loved their neighbor as themselves,” but they did not. At this point the lawyer was probably in agreement that both of these men should have helped the injured man, and they had violated their obligation under the law to love their neighbor. What he was not ready for was the next exemplar Jesus gave.

- D. The next person to pass by was a Samaritan. To say Jews and Samaritans hated each other is an understatement. The Samaritans were the descendants of the ten northern tribes of Israel who intermarried with Gentiles after the Assyrians conquered them and took many of them off into captivity. They also worshiped other gods along with with worship of Yahweh. When the Jews from the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin were taken captive into Babylon, they did not intermarry with foreigners, and they despised the northern tribes for doing so. There is no hatred like family hatred, and that’s what existed between Jews and Samaritans. When Jesus mentions that the one who stopped to help the injured man was a Samaritan, you can imagine the sour expression on the face of the lawyer. But it’s the Samaritan who does for the injured man what the priest and Levite should have done but didn’t. He takes care of the man, binding up his wounds and giving money to the innkeeper to take care of the man until he returned. The one you would not expect to show mercy did.
- E. Jesus’ question to the lawyer answered itself. “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the injured man?” The lawyer knew the answer but couldn’t bring himself to say it was the Samaritan. Instead, he just said, “The one who showed mercy.” Jesus’ instruction to the lawyer was straight forward and powerful: “Go and do likewise.” In other words, you must show mercy to all even as the Samaritan did if you wish to please God. This was a vast expansion of who our neighbor is, one the Jews were not yet ready to accept. Even the disciples were not yet ready to accept that the Samaritans were their neighbor; that would not come until Peter has a vision to go to the home of the Roman centurion to present the gospel in the tenth chapter of Acts.

- F. This was a powerful event that would have been mystifying to most of the listeners that day. The lawyer who wanted to test Jesus probably wished he had never attempted to test him. Those who observed this exchange probably did not yet understand the full impact of Jesus' words. But this simple parable has become one of the most widely known stories in human history. Even those who know nothing of the Bible have heard of The Good Samaritan.

XLV. Luke 10:39-42 Jesus visits Martha and Mary

- A. Jesus is drawing near to Jerusalem. Bethany, the home of Martha and Mary, as well as their brother Lazarus, is only two miles from Jerusalem. We don't know if this was the first visit Jesus had at the home of Martha and Mary, but Luke tells us, "Martha welcomed him into her home." This would have included the twelve as well, so Martha was being an exceedingly good host with many to prepare for.
- B. The issue in this story arises when Martha becomes irritated with her sister Mary because rather than help with preparations for their guests, Mary sits at Jesus' feet to listen to his teaching. While this doesn't seem unusual to us, it was highly unusual in that culture for a woman to be a pupil. For example, rabbinic teaching of the time included the following: "If a man gives his daughter knowledge of the law it is as though he taught her lechery." And, "He that talk much to womankind brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the law and at last will inherit Gehenna."
- C. So, what Mary was doing by sitting listening to Jesus rather than helping her sister tend to their guests was not only irritating to Martha but would have been shocking to others present. Martha goes to Jesus to get him to tell Mary to help her. But Jesus isn't concerned about the cultural barriers Mary was breaking. In a loving but firm way he lets Martha know that Mary has her priorities in the proper order, and he was not about to take from Mary her desire to listen to his words. It was a gentle rebuke to Martha, but a rebuke nevertheless. Mary, who was violating the standard for women in Jesus' day, was commended. It was one of the more radical paradigm

shifts in all of scripture, and it clearly shows Jesus approved of women learning the gospel.

XLVI. Luke 11:1-13 Prayer and persistence in prayer

- A. In this chapter, Luke begins with the subject of prayer. In chapters 5, 6, and 9, Luke has described Jesus deep in prayer before important decisions were made. But until this chapter Jesus has provided no instruction on prayer to the disciples—perhaps because he was waiting for them to ask. The first thing that is striking about Jesus’ instruction on prayer is its simplicity, but in its simplicity is a profoundly powerful prayer.
- B. Although this version of the Lord’s prayer is slightly different from the one quoted in Matthew, they are essentially the same. The prayer begins by addressing God as “Father,” although the Greek work “Abba” is closer to our word “Daddy” or “Papa.” The point is that at a time when the Jews would not even say God’s name out loud for fear of offending their holy God, Jesus was telling his disciples their Heavenly Father wanted a close and intimate relationship with them. He is our Daddy, our Papa, in heaven. He then instructs them to say, “Hallowed be your name,” which is an offer of praise to God for who he is. That is followed immediately by our asking that our Father’s kingdom come to this world. Remember, Jesus’ message was that “the kingdom of God has come.” In this kingdom, right and justice will prevail, and all will be treated with respect and love because our Father first loved us. We ask for our daily bread, which means we ask that our daily needs of all kinds be met. We ask for forgiveness of our sins, but we also commit that we, in turn, will forgive anyone who has sinned against us. Making this commitment reminds us how much we have been forgiven by our Father, which should lead us to forgive all those who have wronged us. It’s a virtuous circle that enables us to keep short accounts with God. Finally, we pray that we will not be led into temptation, which puts the focus on our reliance upon God. This is not suggesting that it is God who tempts us. James mentions in his letter that God tempts no one. In fact, God puts limits on the extent to which any of us can be tempted, and in this prayer we are asking not to be tempted beyond our capacity to resist.

- C. But Jesus' instruction on prayer doesn't end with the model prayer. He goes on to teach by a parable that we should be persistent in our prayers. This parable is a good example of "How much more" teaching which was a popular form of teaching at the time. Jesus is saying that if even a man who is reluctant to help his friend when it is inconvenient to do so will eventually help the friend due to his persistence, *how much more* will our Heavenly Father, who actually loves us, respond to us by hearing and answering our prayers if we are persistent in them.
- D. In verses 9-13 Jesus sums up what he just said in the parable. Ask, seek, knock, for everyone who asks receives, everyone who seeks finds, and for everyone who knocks the door will be opened. In another example of "how-much-more reasoning," he compares earthly parents to God. If we know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more does God know how to give, with his best gift being the Holy Spirit, to those who ask.

XLVII. Luke 11:14-28 Jesus and Beelzebul

- A. These verses show how divided the crowds were that Jesus drew; many were there with mixed motives. The event which drew the different reactions of the crowd was Jesus casting out a demon that had caused a man to be mute—unable to speak. Luke tells us some people were amazed, but some—probably Pharisees and scribes—accused Jesus of accomplishing this by the power of Beelzebul, a high-ranking demon, while others demanded a sign from heaven to confirm what they had just seen happen. This is surprising since the casting out of the demon was itself a sign of the power of Jesus.
- B. Jesus' response to these accusations is more practical than theological. If Satan is working against himself, his house is divided and won't be able to stand. Also, if Jesus is casting out demons by the power of Satan, whose power is it the Pharisees are relying on when they cast out demons? Luke records no response to this question from the crowd which would have included Pharisees. Jesus goes on to say that if it is the "finger of God" that enables him to do this, then they should know that the kingdom of God has come among them. This phrase—"the finger of God"—has history. When Pharaoh's magicians saw the plague of gnats in Exodus 8:19, they

attributed the plague to the “finger of God.” And both Exodus 31 and Deuteronomy 9 indicated that the tablets of the Ten Commandments were written by the “finger of God.” So, Jesus is saying that the power he has exercised has come from the “finger of God”—the same source that delivered the law which the Pharisees have devoted their entire lives to upholding. Both came by the “finger of God.”

- C. Jesus’ parable about the strong man being overpowered by a yet stronger man is Jesus’ way of telling them one more powerful than Satan, or any of his angels, has arrived, as his casting out the demon has demonstrated. In this battle they—the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees—must decide which side they’re on. There’s no room for neutrality in this battle. Jesus plainly tells them they are either with him or against him, and they would have to choose. In our day, a similar choice must be made. The “gods” people rely upon today have changed, but Jesus’ demand that we follow him is the same. The “finger of God” is still at work today, and we must recognize it and commit to Jesus rather than some false god which promises life, success, or peace without the presence of God in their lives.

- D. Furthermore, Jesus adds a warning for those out of whom demons have been cast that they must put their house in order by being obedient to him; otherwise, the demon will return, bringing more demons with him, and the state of the man will be worse than it originally was.

- E. It’s in the middle of this warning from Jesus that a woman from the crowd calls out to bless Jesus by blessing his mother, a common practice at the time. Jesus doesn’t deny the blessing, but he adds that even more blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it. This statement has echoes of the words of Jesus in chapter 8 when the crowd told him his mother and brothers were outside wanting to see him, and he said his relatives were those who hear the word of God and do it. Again, Jesus puts the faith family first.

- A. Remember that Jesus and the disciples are on their way to Jerusalem for the final time. As they proceed, the crowds are growing larger due to the increased popularity of Jesus as word of his miraculous deeds has spread. Jesus apparently does not view the increased crowds as a sign of success. He commented that this generation was evil because they continually asked for a sign, despite the fact they had seen sign after sign from Jesus. Jesus said the most significant sign would be the sign of Jonah, by which Jesus was alluding to his death. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days, Jesus would be in the tomb for three days, arising on the third day. He compared his generation and what they saw to signs delivered to earlier biblical characters—namely the queen of the South and the people of Nineveh. The earlier generations repented, but this generation did not repent even though what they saw was greater than what the earlier generations saw. Again, those whom you would not expect to understand did, and those whom you would expect to understand—those who saw Jesus—did not.
- B. Jesus concludes this dissertation by returning to the metaphor of a lamp to point out nothing will be hidden. The light of the world has been placed where all may see the light, as Jesus himself has declared previously. Jesus then compares the eye as a gateway to let light into our body. Only if the eye is healthy will our body be full of light. In other words, Jesus is saying that he is the light of the world, and those who recognize this will have a healthy eye that enables the body to be full of light—namely, his wisdom and saving grace. Those who do not recognize Jesus as the light of the world will live in darkness. And it will do them no good to ask for a sign, for Jesus himself was the sign they have been looking for. But they didn't recognize him; they just kept asking for more signs, ignoring the one they had already been given.

XLIX. Luke 11:37-54 Jesus denounces the Pharisees and Lawyers

- A. For anyone who thinks of Jesus as only meek and mild, these verses should challenge that view. Here, Jesus is in full prophet mode in his judgments upon the Pharisees and the lawyers. Luke alone among the gospels records three instances in which Jesus shares a meal with a Pharisee—in chapter 7, here, and in chapter 14—and none of those occasions goes well for the Pharisee. It's important to understand that during Jesus' ministry there were two schools of thought among the Pharisees. The first was the school of Hillel who was known for his gentleness and his concern for the poor. The other school was that of Shammai. He was a contemporary of Hillel and was

noted for the most severe interpretations of the law. Hillel died around 20 A.D., and thereafter his influence waned and the followers of Shammai became more influential, taking control of the Great Sanhedrin Court. Shammai's followers were the majority of Pharisees during Jesus' ministry, and they were almost always the ones with whom Jesus had conflicts. On almost every point of conflict Jesus sided with the Hillel interpretation of scripture rather than the Shammai interpretation. For example, Shammai taught that the outside of the cup must be clean but not necessarily the inside, whereas Hillel taught that the inside should be washed first. Jesus picks up on this point in his criticism of the Pharisees.

- B. The issue that set Jesus off on his criticisms was that the host Pharisee took issue with Jesus not washing before the meal. The washing referred to had nothing to do with cleanliness—the reason we wash before meals. The washing the Pharisees insisted upon was for *ritual purity*. When the Pharisee questioned Jesus for not washing before dinner, he responded by highlighting the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. He said they are like one of their cups, clean on the outside but full of greed on the inside. He said the Pharisees are foolish for being concerned about outward righteousness while being unconcerned over inner righteousness, for the same God who made the outside also made the inside. Jesus says they should develop inner righteousness by giving to the poor—a very Hillel thing to say—and then they would have true righteousness.
- C. But Jesus doesn't stop with the food issue. He goes on to point out how they are so strict about tithing, even in inconsequential matters, but have neglected justice and the love of God (which violates the first commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind). He also criticized them for seeking places of honor and failing to show humility or empathy. In short, Jesus had dressed them down for their concern about outward righteousness while neglecting matters of the heart. In other words, they were being hypocrites.
- D. Present at this meal also were lawyers, the scribes who were the experts in Jewish law. One of the scribes objected to what Jesus was saying because the criticism Jesus leveled at the Pharisees would also apply to them because they were the ones who interpreted the law the Pharisees were following. This brought Jesus to pronounce

woes upon the lawyers. They were loading people with burdens hard to bear and actually preventing people from entering into the kingdom of God. He says it is ironic that the lawyers were currently building monuments to the prophets their forefathers had killed, yet they had approved of what their forefathers had done. So, they would also be liable for what their ancestors had done when judgment day comes.

- E. In a final woe to the lawyers, Jesus tells them they have taken away the key of knowledge of God's intent in the law. They had refused to recognize what God intended in the law, and they had hindered the people from understanding God's intent. In short, it was a blistering denunciation.
- F. Luke tells us in the final verses of this chapter that the Pharisees and scribes thereafter were very hostile toward Jesus, lying in wait to catch him in a statement or action that would allow them to bring charges against Jesus. That resolve by the Pharisees and scribes will play out in dramatic fashion during the rest of the gospel of Luke, ultimately resulting in Jesus going to the cross.

L. Luke 12:1-12 What to fear and what not to fear

A. In reading these verses it's important to remember Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem for the final time. The occasion is Passover, and Jesus knows he will be tried and crucified; he has been trying to let his disciples know what lies ahead for him, but they still don't understand. Some commentators have argued that by this point Jesus has become caught up in his disputes with the Pharisees and scribes, and that the momentum of his ministry has led him to the point of no return as he approaches Jerusalem for what will be the final time. But it's important for us to understand that Jesus could have abandoned his ministry at any time, disappeared, and returned to a quiet life in Galilee as a carpenter. Had he done so, the powers-that-be would have quickly lost interest in him. Jesus, of course, was not about to do that because, as he announced many times previously, he had come to do his Father's will, whatever that may be. He is prepared to lay down his life pursuant to his Father's instructions for the good of mankind—you and me. The point is, he laid down his life; no one took it from him.

B. Because so little time is left for him to instruct his disciples, we will see that his teaching becomes concentrated. There will be more maxims—short sayings that are easy

to remember and which convey a vital truth. These maxims will be delivered to the disciples—and sometimes to the crowds—as the crowds grow ever larger due to the great influx of people to and around Jerusalem for Passover. In this chapter, Jesus tells the disciples what to fear and what not to fear, which will be critical for them to understand once he is no longer with them physically.

C. Verses 1-3 appear to be a continuation of what he told the Pharisees in the last chapter. There, he criticized both the Pharisees and the scribes for their hypocrisy. His rebuke of them took place at a private dinner hosted by a Pharisee. Now, Jesus is surrounded by a crowd of thousands, but he speaks first privately to his disciples, returning to the issue of the importance of their not becoming hypocrites like the Pharisees and scribes. He tells them to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, which was their hypocrisy, their biggest sin. Keep in mind, this is taking place during the preparation for the Passover. As part of that celebration, every trace of yeast had to be removed from the Jewish home. Why? Yeast is a perfect metaphor for sin. A tiny amount will eventually work its way through an entire batch of bread dough. Jesus is telling them sin, especially the sin of hypocrisy, will infect their entire lives if they do not avoid it. Remember, the disciples have been arguing about who was the greatest, and they will do so again on the very night Jesus is arrested. After they are empowered by the Holy Spirit following Pentecost, they will be easy targets for hypocrisy. He had to make them realize how destructive that would be. They had to be humble and the same in their private lives as they were in their public lives. There would be nothing secret for them that would not become known; whatever they might say in private would become public. They could not be devout in public and selfishly ambitious or greedy in private.

D. It's unclear in verses 4-12 whether Jesus is still addressing only his disciples or the larger crowd. However, the urgency in his message is clear. He tells them whom to fear and whom not to fear. Don't fear the one who can kill the body; fear the one who can throw you into hell. But don't be afraid if you trust in God. Sparrows have little value in this world, but God remembers them all. God knows even the number of hairs on our head. We have great value in God's sight, much more than the sparrows of whom God is well aware as part of his creation. In short, Jesus is saying that if we fear God, we need not fear anyone or anything else. In verses 11-12, Jesus tells them not to worry even if they are called before the authorities, for the Holy Spirit will tell them what to say on such an occasion.

E. Continuing with the theme of what to fear and what not to fear, Jesus bluntly tells them—and I believe this was directed to the crowd—that if we acknowledge him before

others, he will acknowledge us before God on judgment day. But if we do not acknowledge him, he will not acknowledge us. Lest we're fearful that we have denied Jesus somewhere in our past that might lead to our eternal separation from God, the subsequent verses show that is not so. As we will see later in Luke, Peter—the leader among the disciples—denied knowing Jesus three times on the night Jesus was arrested, but he was forgiven and restored after the resurrection.

F. Verse 10 is one of the most misunderstood verses in all of the New Testament. Jesus is making a distinction between someone who seeks forgiveness for speaking in a dishonorable or disbelieving way about himself—which many people do before coming to a saving knowledge of Christ—and someone who persists in an unrepentant resistance to the work of the Holy Spirit and his message regarding salvation through Jesus Christ. Although God is always ready to forgive our sins, one who refuses during this lifetime to respond to the Spirit's urging by hardening his or her heart has removed himself from God's provision for redeeming us. If you worry that you have committed this unforgivable sin, be assured that your concern is itself evidence of an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit and that you have not hardened your heart.

LI. Luke 12:13-21 Parable of the rich fool

A. In the middle of Jesus teaching the very large crowd, someone in the crowd called out to Jesus, asking that he instruct his brother to share the family inheritance with him. This was obviously a legal dispute, and just as Jesus was not ready in John, chapter 8, to pass judgment on the woman caught in adultery, he is not going to become involved legally in this family inheritance conflict. Instead, Jesus senses that there is an element of greed in the request, and he issues two of his maxims to the crowd. First, be on guard against all types of greed. Second, one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. But maxims are not retained as long or as clearly as parables, so Jesus proceeds to tell the parable of a man who is rich in possessions but lacking in wisdom. He was already rich, but a bountiful harvest exceeded the capacity of his barns, so he decided to build larger ones so he could "relax, eat, drink, and be merry." Clearly, this was a man who took no notice of the needs of his neighbors whom God had instructed him to love as himself. God's judgment fell upon him the very night he made his decision, telling him his life would be demanded of him. Jesus warned the crowd that this is what would befall anyone who stored up treasures on earth without being obedient to God. Note, this parable does not condemn wealth as such, but it emphasizes that God expects those who have

been given much to be obedient to God's commandment to love our neighbor and care for him.

LII. Luke 12:22-34 Do not worry

- A. Jesus continues in these verses his teaching on what to fear and what not to fear. He addresses worry, which we all do when there is reason to fear. He has just told the parable of the rich fool, a man so fearful of not keeping all his possessions he built bigger barns. Jesus tells his disciples that unlike the rich fool, they are not to worry about temporal things such as food and clothing, pointing out in a maxim that life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. He uses ravens and lilies as parables to show how God provides even for lowly plants and animals; we should trust that God will meet our needs, for we are of more value to him than plants and animals. Worrying about our temporal needs does nothing to improve our situation; God knows our temporal needs and has promised to meet them. We must live differently from the world which is consumed with temporal things. In verses 32-34, Jesus summarizes what he has been saying. We should not be afraid because our Father wants to give us the kingdom of God. If we have that, nothing else is to be feared. For where our treasure is, there is where our heart will be.

LIII. Luke 12:35-48 Faithful and unfaithful servants

- A. Having instructed them not to be fearful, Jesus addresses the importance of the disciples being faithful and watchful servants. He uses the example of servants awaiting the return of the master following the wedding banquet. The servants didn't know when the master would return, but they had to be ready and alert for his return at any hour. Jesus is preparing them for the day he would no longer be with them physically. As to when he might return, Jesus switches to the example of a thief breaking into a house to emphasize no one knows when he might return, and they must be ready at all times for his return, for he will return "at an unexpected hour." At whatever hour he returns, the disciples must be watching and waiting. This, Jesus says, is the true indication of their faithfulness to him. These words apply to us as well. Jesus may return, as promised, at a time we don't expect it. Likewise, we don't know when the sand in our hourglass may run out, sending us to Jesus at an unexpected time. In either case, Jesus is clear that he expects to find us faithfully watching and waiting for him.

- B. Peter, as he often did, voiced the question all the other disciples were also wondering: Is this parable just for us or for everyone? Verse 42 seems to refer to Peter whom Jesus made the leader of the apostles. However, Jesus went on to extend the original parable to include all of his servants. The servants who faithfully watch and wait will be richly rewarded, while those who begin to doubt their master's return and abuse those who have been entrusted to the servants' care will be punished. Again, Jesus sums up with a maxim. "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded."
- C. Jesus' words should remind us that being his followers is serious business. He freely forgives our sins when we genuinely repent, but he expects us to be obedient and to obey his commandments. We have been given much, so much will be required of us. And as we are obedient to him, he will give us even more responsibility. We won't always feel like obeying or taking on more responsibilities for the kingdom of God. But the love we have for God and for each other is not just a feeling; it is a commitment to be obedient whatever our feelings may be at the time. Jesus didn't want to go to the cross and asked his Father to remove that cup from him, but he also prayed that his Father's will be done, not his own. We must follow his example.

LIV. Luke 12:49-59 Fire on the earth

- A. As we consider these verses it's important to remember that Jesus is surrounded by a large crowd where the people have wildly different opinions and misinformed aspirations concerning Jesus. Some are interested only in his miracles and what Jesus can do for them; others think he may be the Messiah, but that usually meant they thought he would be a military leader like David who would drive out the Romans and liberate the Jews. The crowd also included his critics who were looking for grounds to discredit him or get rid of him altogether. With this in mind, consider the tone of Jesus' comments and how they have changed in this chapter. He began by telling them what to fear and what not to fear, reminding them not to worry about temporal things; God knows we need them, and he will meet our needs. Those verses sound more like the "gentle Jesus meek and mild" that characterize the one-dimensional view some Christians have of Jesus. But then he steps up the intensity of his comments by warning them against failing to be faithful and watchful servants

who are obedient to their master, always ready for his return. If they are not faithful, the punishment will be severe when judgment day comes. Now, in these verses he tells them bluntly what to expect as a result of his coming, and it is not peace. He knows that his followers will suffer much for his sake, and he is warning them so they will know what is happening when division and persecution come.

- B. He says he has come to bring fire to the earth, by which he means the fire of the Holy Spirit. He wishes that fire had already come, but first he must suffer his “baptism,” by which he means his crucifixion, and he admits he is under tremendous stress until it is accomplished. Although he looks forward to the coming of the Spirit, he bluntly says that will not bring peace to the earth, but division. And so it has. As Jesus predicted, families have been torn apart over him; to this day, more believers are being killed worldwide by family members than ever before. Likewise, the religious wars in Europe which led to our having a freedom-of-religion clause in our constitution continue in other parts of the world where pronouncing faith in Jesus Christ can lead to a death sentence. The peace Jesus has brought to the world has been inner peace. We remain far from peace among families, among neighbors, and among nations.
- C. In verses 54-56, Jesus raises the intensity further by expressing his profound disappointment that the people can accurately forecast the weather and know what is coming, but they are utterly unable to read the signs of the times and recognize how far they are from God. Jesus’ calls them hypocrites, undoubtedly because they claimed to be the people of God, yet they ignored what God required of them and ignored his warnings of the coming judgment if they did not repent, which he strongly emphasizes in the next chapter. This prophecy was fulfilled within a generation of those listening to Jesus’ words on this occasion. In A.D. 70, the Roman army totally destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.
- D. Verses 57-59 appear to contain practical advice about how to resolve legal disputes without going to prison. However, given the context of what went before in this chapter and what Jesus addresses in the next chapter, it’s actually a parable about getting right with God before the judgment comes. Note how different is the tone of

these verses compared to the initial verses of this chapter. But Jesus' time on earth is short, and he is determined to warn the people that they must listen to him and obey, or the consequences would be dire.

LV. Luke 13:1-20 A commentary on the Job equation

- A.** The topics addressed in verses 1-20 appear to involve a diverse set of issues. However, I believe they can all be fairly said to be a commentary on the Job equation, which gets its name from the book of Job and its namesake. The equation is a simple formula that says if you are obedient, God will bless you, but if you are disobedient God will punish you or otherwise discipline you. However, as we know from experience, as well as scripture, life is not always so simple or straightforward. Indeed, even though Job was innocent, he suffered greatly. Most of the book of Job consists of his friends expounding the Job equation and haranguing Job to admit his sin so he could be forgiven. Job 4:7 is a perfect example of what his friends believed. Yet, Job was innocent, as God confirmed, rebuking Job's friends for accusing him of being sinful. There are also references in the wisdom literature of the inadequacy of the Job equation to explain why some people suffer while others prosper. We tend to like rules like the Job equation because they are simple and easy to understand. But the connection between sin and suffering is never quite as simple as the Job equation.
- B.** With that background, let's address the question put to Jesus in verses 1-5. Jesus has been talking about fire and judgment, which apparently led to someone mentioning the issue of Pontius Pilate murdering a group of Galileans while they were in the act of offering sacrifices. This person apparently thought this was a good example of the Job equation and that it was their sins which had led to their death at the hands of Pilate. Jesus, however, rejects that equation, saying they were no worse sinners than any other Galileans. Jesus then gives another example, eighteen people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. In this example as well, Jesus rejects the idea they suffered because they were worse sinners than any others. *All* sin needs to be repented of, and Jesus tells the crowd they must repent, or they will perish just as those in the unfortunate incidents did. Jesus isn't saying they will perish in the same way, or even in this life, but they will perish on judgment day if they do not repent. It is a pointed warning to anyone who believes he need not repent to be

reconciled with God, but rather just needs to be better than most people. Jesus is reminding them God doesn't grade on the curve.

- C. Jesus follows up this point with a parable about a man who had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, but it produced no fruit for three years. He instructed his gardner to cut it down, but the gardner becomes the advocate for the tree, asking the owner to give him one more year to make the fig tree fruitful before he cuts it down. What is striking about this parable is that Jesus doesn't tell us the outcome. The crowd is left to wonder about the outcome of the tree and what is the meaning of the parable, as are we. We are left to wonder whether we are the fruitless tree and whether our lack of fruit is entirely our own fault. And we are left to wonder if Jesus is the gardner who will become our advocate. The parable seems to indicate there is more going on than the Job equation. Fruitlessness isn't always the sole fault of the tree, nor is fruitfulness only the achievement of the tree. There are sometimes other factors at work, not all of which we will be aware of. But rather than spending our time speculating on *why* someone else has suffered, we must keep in mind that we must always be ready to repent of our own sins.
- D. Verses 10-17 provide another example of a synagogue leader wanting to apply the Job equation and Jesus rejecting it by healing a woman with a crippling condition. Luke tells us it's a sabbath, and a woman is present at the synagogue who has been crippled by a demonic spirit that has caused her to be bent over, unable to straighten up. According to the Job equation she's in this state because she has sinned. Pursuant to the equation she's supposed to do something—or many somethings—good to possibly be healed. Jesus, however, doesn't tell her that her sins are forgiven, indicating that sin was not the cause of her suffering. He simply tells her she is free of her ailment, and as soon as he touches her, she is healed. The woman immediately begins to praise God, but the leader of the synagogue is incensed that Jesus has performed this healing on the sabbath. Perhaps he is also upset that the woman didn't have to perform some good deed or act to bring about her healing as the Job equation would require. In any event, he tells the synagogue crowd to come for healing on days other than the sabbath. Jesus responds by point out the hypocrisy. It was permissible to untie and give water to an ox or donkey on the sabbath, yet the Jewish leaders, including this synagogue leader, considered it impermissible to heal on the

sabbath a woman whom Satan had bound for eighteen years. The leader had no response to Jesus' comment—how could he?—and the people rejoiced at the healing.

- E. Jesus then gives two parables to emphasize how something very small can have such a large impact. A tiny mustard seed grows into a large tree, and a small amount of yeast leavens the whole loaf. There are several possible meanings we can attach to these parables. A small amount of faith can have a large and vast impact or outcome. Likewise, a series of small encounters in Israel two thousand years ago have had a significant impact in the vast kingdom of God which extends across the entire world.

- F. So, how are we to view the Job equation, and how is suffering to be viewed if not a punishment for sin? There are differing views among the faithful on this topic, but the best answer—at least to me—is that although suffering is *sometimes* the result of sin, at other times God uses suffering as he sees fit to bring about his will in this world, and we may never fully understand the connection between sin and suffering (Job didn't either) which is seldom as simple as we would like it to be.

LVI.

Luke 13:22-30

The narrow door

- A. Verse 22 reminds us that Jesus is still on his way to Jerusalem for his final Passover. He has received questions from the crowds about repentance and judgment. Now, someone asks if only a few are going to be saved. Jesus answers with a parable, and it is sobering.

- B. Jesus bluntly tells them the way to salvation is narrow. There is only one door through which to enter. And once the door is shut, no others will be allowed in. In the parable, Jesus is obviously the door; at other times, he has identified himself as the gate to the sheepfold, but the idea is the same. What is frightening about this parable is that Jesus says the owner will not allow in some who even claimed they ate and drank with him. This is consistent with Jesus' teaching that it is not those who merely listen to him that will be saved; it is those who make a commitment to him and are obedient that will be saved. But Jesus goes on to show that salvation is available to all because he says people will come from the four corners of the globe and will eat in the kingdom of God. On the other hand, even though the Jews see

their patriarchs inside, their Jewishness alone will not save them, just as being a Gentile will not preclude someone entering the kingdom. Jesus says this day will be a time of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” for many, namely those who disregarded the narrow door, believing they could determine their own way into the kingdom on their terms. So, many of those who were considered first will be last, and some who were last will take first place. The kingdom of God is different than the kingdom of this world.

LVII. Luke 13:31-35 The lament over Jerusalem

- A. These verses show us something rarely seen elsewhere in the gospels. Some Pharisees appear to be concerned about Jesus’ safety and warn him that Herod is seeking to kill him. Jesus’ response is toward Herod, whom he calls a “fox. He says he will continue his ministry despite any threats from Herod. He will continue to heal, cast out demons, and bring people into the kingdom of God. His reference to completing his work on the third day is apparently a prophecy of his resurrection, which will complete his earthly work. But until then he must travel on toward Jerusalem.
- B. Thinking of Jerusalem brings a lament from Jesus as he remembers how many of God’s prophets have perished in Jerusalem, often at the hands of disobedient and faithless Jewish kings. He had come to restore the relationship between Israel and God, as well as extend the relationship to the entire world, but he says of Jerusalem as a representative of all of Israel, “you were not willing.” And because of this, “your house is abandoned to you,” a reference to the forthcoming destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

LVIII. Luke 14:1-14 Another dinner with a Pharisee

- A. These verses describe Jesus’ third, and final, dinner with a leading Pharisee recorded in Luke. This one, however, is far less adversarial than his previous two dinners with Pharisees. You will recall that at his last dinner at the home of a Pharisee in chapter 11, Jesus pronounced “woes” on the Pharisees and the scribes who were present; in this dinner, no such woes are proclaimed. However, Luke tells us that, as in the previous dinners, the Pharisees were watching Jesus closely. It was a sabbath, and although he was probably not a guest, a man was present who had dropsy, a disease that causes the body to retain fluids and can be quite painful. Noticing his presence,

Jesus asks the scribes and Pharisees the question that had stirred up controversy so often previously: whether it is lawful to heal on the sabbath. Luke records no negative response; they simply remain silent. To agree that it was lawful would have conflicted with the orthodox position that no work could take place on the sabbath, and healing was “work.” When there was no reply, Jesus healed the man and sent him on his way.

- B. Jesus follows up with an example to show the lack of compassion of not healing on a sabbath when the opportunity presents itself. If a child or ox falls into a well, wouldn't you pull him out even on a sabbath? The answer appears to us to be too obvious to even justify asking the question. But the scribes and Pharisees had gone to such extreme lengths to describe work that it included even using a bucket to draw water from a well, which rendered it impermissible work on a sabbath. So, rescuing an animal, or even a child, from a well would likewise be work—although if one used a woman's girdle to draw the water it was not work in their convoluted definitions. The scribes and Pharisees have no response to this question, and Luke gives no indication of an adversarial attitude. Perhaps these Pharisees were from the Hillel school.
- C. In verse 1 of this chapter, we are told the scribes and Pharisees are watching Jesus closely. In verse 7, it is Jesus watching the guests closely. What he observed was the Pharisees and scribes jockeying for position at the banquet table. Each one wanted the highest seat his rank would allow—that is, closest to the host. This, of course, was indicative of a lack of humility on their part, which undoubtedly often led to their being humiliated when they were then told to give up their coveted seat to someone of a higher rank. Jesus uses this episode to urge them to develop humility by voluntarily taking a less prestigious seat. The maxim he is trying to get them to understand is: “Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” This, of course, has a far wider application than just seats at a banquet. Jesus follows up this maxim with the advice not to extend dinner invitations or other courtesies only to those who can repay but offer them to those who cannot repay. In those instances, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous rather than in this lifetime.

- A. There appears to be acceptance of what Jesus has just told those at the dinner because one of the guests offers a *berakah*—a type of Jewish blessing. This *berakah* reflected the expectation of those present that they—and perhaps all Jews except for blatant sinners—would eat bread in the kingdom of God. In other words, they would go to heaven. Jesus offers another parable to explain who would, in fact, eat bread in the kingdom of God. A man, obviously very rich, plans a very large banquet and extends invitations to many. In that culture, an invitation to a banquet would be extended and an RSVP would be expected. That would be followed days or weeks later by a notice that the banquet was now ready. Apparently, the original guests had given an acceptance, but when notified that the banquet was actually ready, they began to come up with excuses that were lame or insulting—so much so that the host was angry. The host then acts out the advice Jesus had just given to his Pharisee host to invite the poor and those unable to repay the invitation. When there is still room left, he instructs the slave to go out to the highways and byways to bring in people from all walks of life to fill up the banquet. Noticeably, none of those to whom the initial invitation was sent will share in the banquet. Jesus does not explain his parable, but it's meaning is not unclear. Those who reject God's invitation, regardless of their status as part of a favored group, will be shut out from the great banquet while those who were not from the favored group will be present at the banquet if they accept the invitation.
- B. Once again, we see that as Jesus' time grows short on his way to Jerusalem and the cross, his teaching becomes more pointed and urgent. He wants all to accept their invitation into the kingdom of God, but those who refuse the invitation will not enter. It's another example of a theme we mentioned at the beginning of our study. Those who should have understood often did not; and those whom you might not expect to understand often did understand.

LX. Luke 14:25-35 The cost of discipleship

- A. In this last scene in chapter 14, Jesus is back on the road to Jerusalem, and the crowds are back and growing. Rather than offer encouraging words to grow his crowds even larger, Jesus lets them know that becoming his follower is serious business, and they should not commit to becoming a disciple without counting the cost. To make his point with the crowd, Jesus, as he often did, engaged in hyperbole. He says you must hate your family members and even life itself to be his follower. Remember, in

chapter 6, he told the crowd they must love even their enemies, so Jesus is using hyperbole language in this instance to demonstrate the priorities his disciples must have. Their commitment must be first to him rather than family, or any other cause or person. Otherwise, they are not fit to be his disciple.

- B. Jesus backs up these comments with two parables that starkly demonstrate how serious a matter it is to become his disciple. The first is a man who sets out to build a tower without first calculating the cost. If he cannot finish it, he will have wasted all the resources he spent on the tower without accomplishing anything, except impoverishing himself. The second parable is that of a king who should consider whether he has the troops and other resources to take on an army approaching him. If not, he should sue for peace before the battle begins. He admonishes the crowd to be ready to give up their possessions to become his followers. Again, Jesus is setting priorities. He is not saying having possessions is evil. There are many examples of rich men (and women) in the New Testament who found favor with God. But Jesus is saying he must be the disciple's first priority, not his wealth or possessions. Otherwise, the person is not fit to be his disciple. Given the fact that most in the crowd thought that Jesus becoming the Messiah meant he would become king over a renewed and powerful Israel and able to reward his followers, Jesus wanted to ensure that the crowd, and even his closest disciples, understood what would be required of them.
- C. The final verses in this chapter dealing with salt may seem unconnected with what Jesus has just said, but, in fact, they are consistent. The salt in Jesus' area at that time came from the Dead Sea, and it had impurities that sometimes caused the salt to become rancid. If so, it was no good and had to be thrown out. In other words, it lost its usefulness as salt. In the same way, anyone who loses or abandons his allegiance to Jesus would be worthless as a disciple. This is similar to Jesus' words earlier in Luke that anyone who puts his shoulder to the plow but then wants to return to the old life is not fit to be his disciple. Jesus is quite clear in his teaching that he wants fully committed disciples, not occasional visitors who will turn back at the first hardship. He also wanted his followers to know that following him would not lead to riches in a king's court.

- A. We discussed previously the makeup of the crowds following Jesus as he heads to Jerusalem. These verses mention that the crowds included tax collectors and sinners. Remember, most Jews considered tax collectors to be the biggest of sinners. Not only were they following Jesus, but he also welcomed them and ate with them, which was anathema to the Pharisees and scribes, and they grumbled about it. Rather than give them a rational, abstract reason for his dealing with sinners in this way, Jesus offered a parable, actually two parables, followed by a third, which is perhaps the best-known parable in history—the parable of the prodigal son.
- B. In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus uses the four-part structure present in all three of these parables. Something is lost; it is searched for; it is found; and there is rejoicing over it being found. This parable is given to a mixed crowd. There are tax collectors and sinners, Pharisees and scribes—the righteous people, at least in their own minds—and many ordinary people. We must keep this in mind as we decide who the various people in the crowd will associate themselves with in the parable. Probably none of the people present would have identified themselves with the shepherds, since they were esteemed only slightly higher than the tax collectors and sinners. In any event, the story is of a shepherd losing one of his 100 sheep. Jesus asks, “Wouldn’t any shepherd leave the 99 to go find the one lost sheep?” It’s helpful to understand that shepherds always worked in pairs, so the shepherd isn’t abandoning the 99 in his search for the one lost sheep; his partner would look after them while he searched for the one who was lost. When he finds the lost sheep, he puts it on his shoulder and joyfully returns to the fold. Then he rejoices with friends and neighbors that the lost sheep has been found. What would have shocked the Pharisees and scribes is Jesus’ statement that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who need no repentance. The Pharisees and scribes assumed it was they who caused rejoicing in heaven. Keep in mind that a parable cannot be pressed on all points. The Pharisees and scribes were also sinners in need of repentance, although they often didn’t recognize their own sinfulness. Jesus is making the point that *all* inhabitants of the kingdom of God, along with angels, should rejoice over the repentance of even the least in God’s kingdom. Rather than complain that tax collectors and sinners were listening to Jesus’ teaching, the Pharisees and scribes should be glad the sinners were seeking God.

- C. In the parable of the lost coin, a woman loses one of her ten coins. It is searched for and found, followed by rejoicing. Again, a parable can't be pressed on all points. There is no mention of who sinned or of who repented. Yet, the point of the parable is that even angels joyfully celebrate whenever a sinner repents, something Jesus is suggesting the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes should learn to do.

LXII. Luke 15:11-32 The parable of the prodigal son

- A. This parable, along with the parable of the Good Samaritan, is one of Jesus' most famous parables, known not just to the faithful but to anyone who grew up in a country dominated by Christian culture. Although it's familiar to us, it would have been shocking to the crowd to which Jesus related the parable. Remember, this parable, along with two previous ones, were given by Jesus after the Pharisees and scribes grumbled that Jesus not only allowed tax collectors and sinners to listen to his teaching, but he also ate with them and mingled with them. So, this parable is offered not only to demonstrate the Father's unbounded compassion and willingness to forgive his children; it's also given to show how the faithful who believe they have *earned* the Father's love can lapse into resentment and anger when they observe the mercy the Father gives to his most wayward children. Jesus was rebuking the behavior the Pharisees and scribes were demonstrating.
- B. The facts regarding the prodigal son are straightforward. The younger son demanded of his father his inheritance while the father was still alive. In effect, he said, "I wish you were dead so I could have what is coming to me; I want it now." This was a despicable thing for the son to do in that culture. Despite no obligation to do so, the father granted the son's request. He then traveled to a distant land and there wasted his money in dissolute living. When the money ran out, he had to take a job feeding the pigs just to survive, a job no self-respecting Jew would take. He finally recognized what a horrible mess he had made of his life, and he decided he would return to the only place he might be accepted, although no longer as a son. He would ask to be permitted to become one of his father's servants. In other words, he would throw himself on the mercy of his father. But he never had the opportunity to complete his humble speech to his father. Seeing the son a long way off, the father ran to him, embraced him, and promptly restored him to his status as a son, including

- a banquet to celebrate his return. This is as clear an example of God's mercy as you are likely to find. The one who had no right to expect anything is given everything.
- C. This is often the point at which we cease considering this parable, perhaps because in our candid moments we realize we are more like the younger son—a prolific sinner—than the outwardly righteous older brother. But the parable continues with the older brother arriving in the middle of the banquet, and he asks a servant what's going on. When he's told that it's a celebration of the return of the younger son, he is immediately angry and bitter, so much so that he refuses to join the banquet or welcome his brother home. It's important to recognize the father's efforts to reconcile between the sons. He goes out to meet the older brother just as he had gone out to meet the younger brother returning home. The father's love for both was equal. The older son then tries to justify his attitude and behavior by complaining he has worked as hard as any servant and never asked for anything, but the father had never thrown a banquet for him. He mentioned how his brother had lived a sinful life compared to the faithful life he had lived. In short, he told his father he had *earned* his father's love and approval whereas his brother had not. The father's response was one of sadness that he had to remind this son that everything the father had was his, and they had to celebrate the return of his brother who had been lost but now was found.
- D. This was a clear rebuke to the judgmental Pharisees and scribes who resented the way Jesus dealt with the sinners. Just as God is merciful, he expects those who claim his name to show mercy to all, not just the righteous—or those who believe they are righteous. It's a lesson we need to apply to ourselves as well. There are times in which we fail to show mercy to others, justifying ourselves that the person isn't worthy of mercy. The younger son wasn't worthy of mercy either, but the father freely gave it. And he expects us to show mercy and rejoice rather than be resentful when some undeserving person receives God's mercy.
- E. There is another person in this parable that we should relate to. It's the father. No, we aren't God, but God does expect us to have character like his and be obedient to him. Just as the father had every right to be disappointed with the younger son, he

had every right to be disappointed with the older son who despite being faithful to his father for many years, resented the mercy his father showed the younger son. The father was merciful toward both, and he expects us to be merciful as well. We live in a time of bitter divisions and harsh judgments. When we disagree, we often fail to do it in a way that encourages reconciliation. There is often a lot of virtue signaling going on to justify our own opinions and allow ourselves to feel superior to those who don't share our opinions or beliefs. It's very easy to do. But God expects us to deal with others as he dealt with the older son as well as how he dealt with the younger son.

LXIII. Luke 16:1-13 Parable of the dishonest manager

- A. This chapter continues with parables Jesus told his disciples and sometimes the crowds. The parables in this chapter are somewhat difficult to understand. It's helpful to remember that Jesus has been contrasting the values of the kingdom of God with the values of this world. Most of the time when we discuss the values of this world, money will eventually be involved. Jesus is quite clear in verse 13 that one cannot serve both God and wealth. So, these parables help us understand the values of the kingdom of God and the appropriate role Jesus says money should play in the kingdom. Also, verse 14 tells us that the Pharisees, who were lovers of money—and therefore often at odds with Jesus' teaching—not only grumbled at Jesus' teaching in this chapter, they also actively ridiculed him.
- B. The parable of the dishonest manager begins with a rich man learning that his manager, who managed all of his financial affairs, had been embezzling money from him. The implication is that he had done this by adding a percentage to any bill he rendered to his master's debtors, and then he would keep the additional amount for himself when the bill was paid. Upon learning of this, the master tells him to give him an accounting, or what we might today call an audit, of what he had handled in the course of his work, after which he would be fired. The shrewd manager instantly realized he would be in a desperate situation once he lost his job, so he came up with a plan to ingratiate himself with his master's debtors so they would still do business with him, or perhaps employ him, once he was fired. He decided to give a discount to the debtors so they would pay their bills right away, which would please the master because it would improve his cash flow. Although not expressly stated, the implication is that he discounted the bills about the same amount he had inflated them

previously. In any event, when the master learned what the manager had done, he commented on how shrewd the manager had been—somewhat similar to movies in which a reluctant admiration is given for an exceptionally clever thief. However, the manager was still fired.

- C. So, what is the point of this parable. Clearly, it was not given as a model for how we are to behave with respect to money or property entrusted to our care. This is a parable in which Jesus is saying that if even the dishonest manager realizes he must handle what has been entrusted to him in a manner that will ensure a good future for himself, Jesus' followers should likewise realize they must handle what has been entrusted to them in a manner that will bring them a reward in the kingdom of heaven. In the kingdom of God, money has a more limited purpose than in the kingdom of this world. In this world, money is used not just to meet one's needs, but to bring attention, power, prestige, luxury, revenge or control. But for the faithful, money should be used to build relationships and promote the kingdom of God, as well as meet one's needs, not necessarily all of one's wants. Jesus is saying when you spend your money now, spend it with eternal purposes in mind, and when you handle money for others, handle it as if for God himself. This is not an insignificant point. Jesus taught more often about money and its appropriate use than he did about prayer.
- D. Verses 10-13 confirm that Jesus was not holding up the dishonest manager as a exemplar for us to follow. He says we must be honest in all matters, small as well as large. If we are dishonest in a little matter, we will be dishonest in large matters as well. Dishonesty or unfaithfulness depends more on the character of the person—or lack thereof—than on the amount at issue. This principle applies to more than just money, but Jesus emphasizes how corrupting money can be by flatly proclaiming that one cannot serve God and wealth. It's a lesson we must keep in mind.

LXIV. Luke 16:14-18 The law and the kingdom of God

- A. As noted previously, the Pharisees were listening to Jesus' teaching, and they scoffed at what Jesus was saying because, as Luke says, they were lovers of money. Jesus responds sternly. He says you may fool the people by justifying yourself, but you haven't fooled God, who knows your hearts. Jesus said what you value is often an abomination to God. What follows is a warning to the Pharisees.

- B. In verses 17 and 18, Jesus tells them a boundary has been crossed, and John the Baptist was the boundary. Before John arrived, they looked to the law and the prophets for God's instructions, God's will; this was the old world that the Pharisees still occupied. The new world was inaugurated with the good news of the gospel which Jesus brought, and everyone was strongly urged to accept that good news. This doesn't mean that the law has been done away with, at least not yet. The law had to be fulfilled, and it would be fulfilled in Jesus once he had made his sacrifice on the cross and arose from the dead. In Jesus' teaching, the law was being magnified and clarified to show what God's intent had been in blessing the Jews with the law, an intent the Pharisees had misread in their devotion to ritual purity.
- C. Verse 18 may appear to be addressing a different topic, but it's an example of Jesus clarifying God's intent in the law. This is similar to the examples Jesus gave in Matthew's gospel, chapter 5. There, Jesus expanded the commandment not to murder by admonishing them not to hold onto anger against another. Likewise, the law prohibited adultery, but Jesus said that lust in one's heart amounted to adultery even if the act were not consummated. In this verse, Jesus is saying that although the law permitted divorce, it was never God's intent that husband and wife should divorce. In Matthew, chapter 19 Jesus said divorce was permitted by God only because of the hardness of their hearts. Here, Jesus is saying divorce is a sin, and one who divorces commits the sin of adultery if he or she remarries. (In Matt 5, it should be noted, an exception is given for unfaithfulness) Again, Jesus is clarifying what the Father's intent is for marriage as an example of how the Pharisees had misread God's intent in the law.
- D. Jesus' explanation of what God intended regarding marriage and divorce raises the question of whether divorce is an ongoing sin that cannot be forgiven. The argument some of our forefathers made was that if one divorces and remarries, that person continues to commit adultery so long as the second marriage lasts. It has been a contentious issue in the church over the centuries. Indeed, a prohibition against divorce was even included in the civil law in some American states, with the only available grounds for divorce being adultery. Human nature being what it is, unhappy couples sometimes conspired together for one or both of them to commit adultery

solely so they could get a divorce. The position the church—or most of the church--ultimately arrived at was that the only unforgivable sin was to reject the Holy Spirit's work of urging us to accept God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. If someone divorced, but acknowledged their sin in doing so and repented, forgiveness of this sin, like all other sins, was available, and one could remarry.

LXV. Luke 16:19-31 The parable of the rich man and Lazarus

- A. This series of parables comes to a conclusion with one of the most vivid of Jesus' parables. It dramatically portrays how the values and privileges of this world may be totally reversed in the next world. The rich man had everything this world has to offer, and he indulged himself in his privilege and wealth with little apparent concern for the poor man Lazarus who longed to satisfy his hunger with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, but the rich man apparently ignored Lazarus. Instead, Lazarus only had the mangy dogs licking his sores. They could not have lived more different lives. However, death came to both, and Lazarus was taken to the bosom of Abraham, while the rich man was tortured in hell. In his parable, Jesus has the man able to see where Lazarus is in heaven, next to Abraham, a place of honor. Notably, the man doesn't protest the judgment rendered on him which sent him to hell; however, he asks that Lazarus be permitted to bring him water to cool his tongue, apparently still viewing Lazarus as his errand boy.
- B. The finality of the judgments rendered on these two men is stark. Abraham tells the man he received his good things in his lifetime, with the implication he selfishly enjoyed those things without regard to anyone else, whereas Lazarus had no material wealth, or even a sufficiency, although the implication is that Lazarus was righteous in his poverty. Moreover, says Abraham, there is a vast chasm between heaven and hell over which no one can cross. When he learns that no relief is available for himself, the rich man asks that he be permitted to return to warn his five brothers not to live as he had lived, perhaps the first time he thought of someone else in an unselfish manner. Abraham's reply is that his brothers have Moses and the prophets to warn them; he cannot go back to warn his brothers. The man protests that if his brothers have someone return from the dead to warn them, they will repent.

- C. The response to the man is stunning, at once taking your breath away and sending chills down your back. Jesus says if they won't listen to what Moses and the prophets said, they won't be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. It's a sad and disheartening realization that some will simply refuse to believe no matter what evidence they are shown. Jesus is giving this parable as a warning. They must repent or perish.
- D. Jesus' conclusion to the parable will set the tone for the remainder of Jesus' ministry, and Jesus' statement is confirmed by subsequent events. He raised another man named Lazarus from the dead—the brother of Martha and Mary. Instead of bringing the Jewish leadership to faith in him, that was the final event that convinced them to have Jesus crucified (See, John 11:45-53). And when Jesus himself arose from the tomb, the Jewish leaders rejected the testimony of the guards at the tomb who told them what had actually happened, instead bribing them to say the disciples had come in the middle of the night and stole Jesus' body. (See Matt 28:11-15). Indeed, as Jesus predicted, some will not repent even if they have someone return from the dead to warn them. It's sad but true that some will not repent no matter the evidence; they insist on believing whatever they want to believe.

LXVI. Luke 17:1-10 Some sayings of Jesus

- A. This chapter continues with teachings by Jesus that are somewhat hard to understand, and therefore they must be put into context to understand Jesus' point. The original language of verse one was, "Offenses will come, but woe to the one by whom such offenses come." If that language seems somewhat familiar, it's because President Abraham Lincoln included it in his second inaugural address, referring to the offense of slavery. Jesus was saying that, human nature being what it is, there will always be temptations to sin but the one who causes someone to sin will be held liable and punished severely. Continuing with his comments about sin, Jesus tells the disciples that they should rebuke a fellow believer who sins, and if the person repents, they must forgive—up to seven times a day. This was in contrast to the accepted Jewish belief that one was to forgive someone only up to three times a day. Keep in mind that the disciples believed they were going to be Jesus' trusted aides and advisers when he set up his earthly kingdom in Jerusalem after expelling the Romans. Forgiving someone up to seven times a day was definitely not part of their anticipated duties, and it exceeded anything they had heard previously.

- B. This is the background that led the disciples to ask Jesus to increase their faith. They felt they needed considerably more faith to be able to forgive so often. Jesus' response reflects the truth that when it comes to faith, quantity is not particularly important. He said you only need the tiniest amount of faith—as small as a mustard seed, the tiniest of all seeds—to do great things. What is required is not a great amount of faith, but rather only a small amount of faith in a great God. So, don't worry about whether you have enough faith.
- C. Jesus goes on to tell them a parable about the normal role of a slave. Among his other duties, the slave was to prepare his master's meal and serve him before preparing his own meal. Jesus is not encouraging the disciples to be harsh or uncaring; he is simply pointing out that the servant was only doing his duty by serving his master first, and that we, likewise, must understand that regardless of whatever we are asked to do by our master, Jesus—who has given us everything—we do not become worthy by obeying him. We are only doing our duty by being obedient as any slave should be. We do not like to think of ourselves as slaves, but it is a helpful concept for us as Christians to think of ourselves as slaves to Christ—as Paul frequently did in his letters—because it puts the emphasis on our obedience, the first obligation of slaves.

LXVII. Luke 17:11-19 Jesus cleanses ten lepers

- A. Verse 11 reminds us that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and is at the border between Samaria and Galilee. He is approached by a group of ten lepers as he entered a village, although they kept their distance to avoid Jesus and his disciples being rendered unclean. Keep in mind also that, as we have previously discussed, the belief at the time was that if someone was ill, particularly with leprosy, it was due to sin they had committed. Accordingly, these ten would have considered themselves unworthy, undeserving of attention or particularly of healing by Jesus. Yet, they cry out to him what is in effect the prayer of every sinner: "Master, have mercy on us."
- B. Note that this is another of Jesus' miracles performed in an unmiraculous way. He doesn't even pronounce them healed; he simply tells them to go and present themselves to the priest, which was the prescribed way in the law for a leper to determine whether he had been healed or not. Jesus appears to be challenging their

faith. As he tells them to go submit to an examination by a priest, they still have all the symptoms of a leper; they have not yet been healed. But they accept the challenge and in faith set off to follow Jesus' instructions. On their way, they discover that they have been healed.

- C. Luke tells us that of the ten, only one returned to thank Jesus for the healing, and he was a Samaritan. The implication was that the other nine were Jews. Jesus is once again amazed that all ten had received God's mercy, as they requested, yet the only one who returned to praise God was a Samaritan. This is another perfect example of *hesed*, the Hebrew word for grace or mercy. The one—a Samaritan—who had no right to expect anything was given everything and acknowledged it, while the others who did have the right as Jews to expect mercy from Jesus, failed to return and offer thanks. Jesus commended the Samaritan, telling him his faith had made him well.

LXVIII. Luke 17:20-37 The coming of the kingdom

- A. In these verses, Jesus is using apocalyptic language. Note that in verses 20 and 21 Jesus is responding to a question from the Pharisees who ask him when the kingdom of God will come. But in verse 22 and thereafter he is speaking only to his disciples. This follows the pattern we will see each time Jesus talks about his second coming. He will first describe an event in the near future from which a person can escape, but then he transitions to talking about the end of the world, a cataclysmic event.

- B. When the Pharisees ask him about the coming of the Kingdom of God, they are anticipating an earthly kingdom with the Messiah being anointed king and ruling from Jerusalem, events that will be readily observable. Jesus wants to tamp down such thoughts. He tells them the coming of the kingdom will *not* be with things that can be observed, so don't expect people to declare, "Here it is." In fact, the kingdom of God had already come, and Jesus tells the Pharisees, "It is among you." There is no indication in Luke's gospel—or any of the other gospels—that the Pharisees realized Jesus' ministry was the coming of the kingdom of God.

- C. In verse 22 Jesus is now speaking only to his disciples. He reminds them that he must first endure suffering and be rejected by the Jewish leaders. But with regard to his return—the end of time—this will be an event no one can misunderstand. Just as lightning flashing across the sky, his return will be obvious to all. And it will come suddenly when no one expects it. He compares it to the coming of the great flood, when no one but Noah saw it coming, and to the day Sodom was destroyed, without warning except to Lot and his family. When that day comes, no one can run away from it. Don't run to gather your belongings. Two people will be in bed, and one will be taken; two people will be grinding together and only one will be taken.
- D. The disciples appear stunned by Jesus' words. Remember, they also were anticipating Jesus being declared the earthly king of Israel and ruling from Jerusalem. They ask where this will take place—apparently thinking such a worldwide event could be confined to a single location. Jesus responds that the location will be indicated by signs, just as the appearance of a vulture is a sign of a dead body nearby. Jesus will address this issue again in chapter 21 after they reach Jerusalem.

LXIX. Luke 18:1-8 Parable of the widow and the unjust judge

- A. Jesus is still on the road to Jerusalem, and his time of teaching via parables is growing short. There are three parables in this chapter and one in the next before Jesus reaches Jerusalem. Only two more are given during Holy Week by Luke's account. Unlike some parables, Jesus gives his listeners the reason for this one—the necessity to be persistent in prayer.
- B. The judge in this case is hardly a model judge; he feared neither God nor man, nor did he have respect for either. A widow kept pleading her case before him, but the unjust judge refused to give her any relief. Eventually, however, the judge tired of her persistent efforts to find justice, and he ruled in her favor because she was wearing him down. As with some of Jesus' previous parables, this judge is not being held up as an exemplar; he's just the opposite. Jesus presents this judge as a contrast to God's willingness to respond promptly and with compassion to his children who pray to him with persistence. "Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night," Jesus said. In other words, *how much more* will God, the fount of all justice, grant justice to his children who are persistent in praying to him.

- C. Jesus' final comment appears to be a challenge to his followers: will he find this type of persistent prayer when he returns at his second coming? In the meantime, while we live in a fallen world, the need for persistence in prayer is ever present in the cause of justice and for relief from the results of sin in our personal lives, in our communities, and throughout the world.

LXX. Luke 18:9-17 Parable of the Pharisee and tax collector

- A. This parable echoes the point Jesus made in Luke 14 that those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. It's a warning specifically to those who exalt themselves because of their self-determined righteousness. A Pharisee and a tax collector went to the temple to pray. We know that the Pharisees considered themselves righteous and that the tax collectors were despised by both the high and mighty and the lowly. The Pharisee's prayer reflected his self-assessment that he was righteous. The tax collector's prayer, on the other hand, reflects his awareness that other people's assessment of him was accurate. He *was* a sinner, and he knew it. His prayer was the same as that of the ten lepers: "Lord, have mercy." Jesus confirms that only the tax collector went away justified in God's sight.
- B. Jesus follows up on the main point of this parable when his own disciples turned away children whose parents brought them to him for a blessing. The disciples evidently thought that what they were doing was too important to allow children to distract Jesus from his teaching and healing. Jesus uses this occasion to emphasize that only those who seek the kingdom as a little child will be able to enter. This doesn't mean we must be *childish* in our response to Jesus; it means we must have the faith of a child—in other words we must trust as a child does. A child doesn't worry about whether he will have food or clothing; he trusts his parents for that. Likewise, in times of uncertainty or fear, the child trusts and relies upon her parents to keep her safe. The child does not exalt himself at such times but humbly relies upon the parents. That is the attitude Jesus wants his followers to take toward God.

LXXI. Luke 18:18-34 The rich ruler

- A. This story is also told in the 19th chapter of Matthew, with the man there being described as young, whereas the man here is described as a ruler—although we are not told what he rules. Hence, this is sometimes referred to as the story of the rich young ruler. He seems sincere in asking Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Keep in mind, he would have believed, as most did at the time, that riches were a blessing of God that came only to the righteous. We are told he was rich, but he apparently had a sense that something was missing from his relationship with God, despite the fact that he believed he had kept the law from his youth. Interestingly, he addresses Jesus as, “Good Teacher,” apparently seeing something in Jesus that caused him to believe something was missing in his own life. Jesus’ response that “no one is good but God alone,” was apparently given to challenge him to consider who Jesus was.
- B. The question the man asked was actually a flawed question in the kingdom of God which Jesus had inaugurated. In the kingdom of God, one does not earn eternal life by *doing something*, even keeping the law. One inherits eternal life by accepting in faith the sacrifice of Jesus for one’s sins. But that option was not yet available to him because Jesus’ sacrifice had not yet been made. The problem the man had was that he thought he had fully kept the law all his life, when he had only kept the outward appearance of keeping the law, as his actions showed. The very first commandment was, “You shall have no other gods before me, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.” As Jesus said in chapter 16, “You cannot serve God and wealth.”
- C. This was the man’s problem. He valued his wealth over his relationship with God. When Jesus told him he lacked one thing—go sell your possessions and come follow me, the man wouldn’t do it. Luke does not even record a verbal response to Jesus’ words to him. Matthew’s gospel says, “he went away grieving for he had many possessions.” As he walked away, Jesus said, “How hard it is for anyone who has wealth to enter the kingdom of God—it’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.”

- D. This comment by Jesus—which was a form of hyperbole to make his point—dumbfounded his disciples and others present. The disciples also believed wealth was a reward for the righteous. So, they asked, “If even the righteous have difficulty entering the kingdom of heaven, who can be saved?” Jesus’ response was, in effect, “Men and women don’t save themselves; saving people is God’s business.” Peter still isn’t satisfied with this answer; he seems shaken, and he reminds Jesus he and the other disciples have left everything to follow him. He’s asking for reassurance from Jesus that their sacrifice will be worth it, and Jesus’ response assures him it will be.
- E. In verses 31-34 Jesus again warns the disciples about what lies ahead for himself, and for them, in Jerusalem. He bluntly tells them what will happen to him, that he will be killed before rising again. Luke tells us they still didn’t understand; the meaning of Jesus’ words was hidden from them, which at that time was probably a blessing. Only later will they come to understand what happened and why it happened.

LXXII. Luke 18:35-43 Jesus heals a blind beggar near Jericho

- A. As Jesus and his followers approach Jericho, which is close to Jerusalem, there was a blind beggar by the side of the road. Hearing the noise from the crowd following Jesus, he asked what was going on and was told Jesus was passing by. He must have heard about Jesus previously because he immediately begins shouting, “Jesus, have mercy on me.” This is the perfect prayer, as we have seen previously. Every time someone in Luke’s gospel has asked Jesus to have mercy on him, Jesus has shown mercy in dramatic ways, and this will be no exception. Those around the man try to hush him, but he just shouted louder, undoubtedly realizing this was his one chance to be cured of his blindness. Jesus hears the man, has the man brought to him, and asks what he wants Jesus to do for him. Jesus is asking the man to put into words as an act of faith that which the man obviously wants to happen—he wants to see again. Once he verbalized the request, Jesus said, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.” Now able to see, he glorified God, and the people—stunned at what happened—praised God.
- B. Yet again, we see the *hesed*—the unearned mercy—of God displayed in this story. Jesus is now close to Jerusalem where his mercy will be demonstrated in the most dramatic way possible when he will go to the cross to show the world what the mercy

of God looks like. There, he will give to all of us, who deserve nothing based on our own righteousness, everything that God has to give—his own son—so that we can be reconciled with God and live in harmony with him.

LXXIII. Luke 19:1-10 Jesus and Zacchaeus

- A. Jesus has finally reached Jericho, which is only 23 miles from Jerusalem, and was known as the “city of priests.” However, it’s not a priest that Jesus winds up dining with but rather one of the hated tax collectors. In fact, Zacchaeus was not just your average tax collector; he was a “chief” tax collector, which means he was a supervisor over many tax collectors and would therefore have been subject to extra scorn from the average Jew. Luke tells us up front that he is rich. The reason most tax collectors were rich was that they were authorized by the Romans to collect their taxes, with the full enforcement resources of the Roman government available to back them up. The Romans weren’t concerned about the tax collectors adding something onto tax bills for their own benefit, and it was apparently well known by the Jews that all tax collectors did this. So, the tax collectors were not just acting as agents for the Roman occupiers, they were also fraudulently stealing from their own countrymen under the protection of the Romans. It’s no wonder they were hated by the Jews as much as the Romans were.
- B. Luke also tells us that Zacchaeus was short. By now, the crowds around Jesus were so large the short man was unable to see Jesus as he was passing by. So he ran ahead along the route and climbed into a sycamore tree to be able to get a glimpse of Jesus. The fact he was willing to climb a tree to see Jesus tells us something about Zacchaeus. He obviously knew his reputation was so bad that no harm could come from humbling himself by climbing a tree, something any priest or other person of note in the town would have been embarrassed to do. Perhaps it was this willingness to humble himself that caught Jesus’ attention. In any event, Jesus stopped and told Zacchaeus to come down because Jesus wanted to stay at his house that very day. Luke tells us he quickly came down and welcomed Jesus joyfully. Jesus was probably the first person of note that had treated Zacchaeus with respect in a very long time.

- C. When Jesus has previously welcomed sinners in Luke, it has been the Pharisees and scribes who have complained. In this case, the entire crowd began to complain that Jesus was going to lodge with a sinful man. Zacchaeus heard the complaints, and his response shows that he knew the complaints to be justified. The fact is that he *had* defrauded the people and that he *had* acted as an agent—and a dishonest one at that—of the Romans. His response to the complaints was that he would atone by giving half his possessions to the poor, and that he would repay four-fold to anyone from whom he had extorted money, which was the required remedy for theft in the law. (See Exodus 22:1)
- D. Jesus recognized Zacchaeus' response as that of a genuinely repentant man, and he was obviously impressed with the man's response. Jesus announced—apparently to the crowd as well as to Zacchaeus—that today salvation has come to Zacchaeus' house, for “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.” Jesus has repeatedly said that he had come to proclaim good news to the poor and the downtrodden, but this story shows that he also came to save the rich and powerful, for they also are part of the “lost” Jesus came to save. It's another reminder that Jesus is no respecter of persons, whether rich or poor, prominent or of little note; he reaches out to all to repent and commit to him.

LXXIV. Luke 19:11-27 The parable of the ten pounds

- A. This parable is unique among Jesus' parables because it has similarities to actual historical events that the people were familiar with. The story is of a king who went away to obtain an appointment to a kingdom and whose subjects did their best to stop him from receiving it. When Herod the Great died about two years after Jesus was born, Herod had proposed that his kingdom be divided into three parts, one each for Herod Antipas, Herod Philip, and Herod Archelaus, but that division had to be approved by the Romans. Before they ratified it, Archelaus, to whom Judea had been left, went to Rome to lobby for his inheritance. The Jews sent their own delegation of fifty men to Rome to try to persuade Caesar Augustus not to appoint Archelaus as king of Judea, because they disliked him so much. Augustus appointed him anyway, but gave him the title of Tetrarch rather than king, because he was ruler over less than a full country.

- B. With that historical background, this parable seems to be a blueprint or an outline of what will happen between that time and Jesus' second coming, and it includes references to things that happened during Jesus' lifetime. Verse 11 sets the stage. Luke says the people thought the kingdom of God was about to appear immediately, which meant they thought Jesus was about to be crowned an earthly king over the Jews, and that is what led Jesus to tell the parable. A nobleman (Jesus) goes to a far country (heaven) to obtain royal power. He leaves ten of his servants (disciples) with ten pounds (a pound being about three months wages for a worker) to invest while he is gone. The people who were to become his subjects, however, revolt and send a delegation after him saying they don't want him as their king (the ultimate rejection of Jesus by the Jews).
- C. When the man returns (the second coming) he calls the servants together for an accounting of what they have done with what he left them. Some have done quite well and are told "well done." These are rewarded by towns to rule over in proportion to their fruitfulness with what they were given to invest. But for the one who did nothing with what he had been given, even the one pound he had was taken away and given to the one who had ten pounds, which led to objections by the bystanders because they thought he already had enough with ten pounds. But Jesus repeated what he said in the parable of the sower in chapter 8 of Luke—to those who have, more will be given, and from those who have not, even what they have will be taken away." In other words, those who have proven faithful in carrying out the king's work in the kingdom of God will be given even more responsibility, and those who have not been fruitful will have even less responsibility.
- D. The sentence that the man declares in verse 27—death—does not apply to the servants (the disciples) but rather to those who refused the king's rule over them. If you think this is harsh, keep in mind that Jesus has repeatedly stated that eternal punishment awaits those who have refused God's offer of redemption in Jesus Christ. He has declared he is the way, the truth and the life, the gateway to the sheepfold, and the narrow door. Those who refuse God's means of redemption have refused God's gracious offer and will be separated from God for all eternity. It's a sobering thought, and it should lead us to want to proclaim the gospel as broadly as possible. Note also that it is the last parable Jesus taught before making his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

- E. So, this parable seems to be designed to prepare Jesus' followers for what will become a much longer absence than any of them anticipated—two thousand years and counting—and to encourage them in their work during their lifetimes. It's also another warning for those who refuse to recognize him now as king and Lord.

LXXV. Luke 19:28-44 The triumphal but tearful entry

- A. The journey to Jerusalem that began back at Luke 9:51 has finally come to an end. Jesus is now at the Mount of Olives which overlooks Jerusalem with the Kidron Valley lying between them. From the Mount of Olives Jesus sent two of his disciples to fetch a donkey for Jesus to ride as he entered Jerusalem. This had apparently been prearranged, and the owners of the donkey consented. What happened next was a fulfillment of a prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Jesus was well aware of this prophecy, and he intentionally took a donkey rather than a white horse which conquering kings normally rode in their triumphal parades.
- B. As Jesus began his descent down from the Mount of Olives through the Kidron Valley, his disciples and the great throngs that had been following him broke out in song, with the first part of the song coming from Psalm 118:26—"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord"—followed by a fragment of the song sung by the angels on the night Jesus was born—"Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven." It was an exuberant, festive occasion, with people shouting, praising God and declaring their king had arrived. The anticipation of Jesus being declared the Messiah was sky high. Luke tells us the disciples began to praise God joyfully and loudly for all the miracles and deeds of power they had seen from Jesus.
- C. This was too much for the Pharisees. Some of them demanded that Jesus rebuke his disciples for their messianic statements regarding Jesus, but he responded that even the stones would cry out if his disciples were silenced. There was no turning back at this point.

D. Amid the jubilation of this moment, as they approach the walls of Jerusalem, Jesus had a vision or a prophetic insight for what lay ahead for Jerusalem and the Jews. He foresaw that ramparts will be set up all around Jerusalem to overrun it, and that the city will be totally destroyed, along with all its inhabitants. This is exactly what happened to Jerusalem and its people in A.D. 70—some 40 years later—when the Romans surrounded and then destroyed Jerusalem, reducing it to rubble, including the temple. The vision brought tears to Jesus’ eyes in the middle of the celebration. He said this will happen because, “you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God,” referring to his own ministry.

LXXVI. Luke 19:45-48 Jesus cleanses the temple for a second time

- A. Early in Jesus’ ministry he had cleansed the temple of money changers and merchants selling animals for sacrifice. This was apparently taking place in the court of the Gentiles which was part of the temple complex. (See John, chapter 2). This is happening again in Luke during the Passover celebration, and Jesus won’t stand for it. The court of the Gentiles was the only area of the temple the Gentiles could enter, and it was their only area in the temple to pray. Jesus declared the temple was to remain a house of prayer, not a den for thieves, and he drove them out.
- B. This obviously didn’t play well with the chief priests and other Jewish leaders, and they looked for a way to arrest Jesus and get rid of him once and for all. But they had to find a way to do it out of sight of the people because, as Luke tells us, “the people were spellbound by what they heard.”

LXXVII. Luke 20:1-8 The authority of Jesus questioned

- A. In this chapter we will see a series of questions presented to Jesus by the Jewish leaders, not to learn what the answers may be but to catch Jesus in responses that could lead to his prosecution. In other words, they thought they were asking “gotcha questions.” Additionally, Jesus will present questions to the Jewish leaders that they cannot answer or that demonstrate their errors.
- B. Jesus is teaching in one of the courtyards in the temple complex when a delegation consisting of chief priests, scribes and elders, which would have included members of the Sanhedrin court, confront him with the question of by what authority was he

doing these things. This has primary reference to Jesus driving the money changers and merchants from the temple upon his arrival in Jerusalem. Note that they didn't question the correctness of what Jesus did; they simply demanded that he tell them by what authority he acted. This question—simple on its face—is designed to trap Jesus. If he says he obtained that authority from a human source, they can report him to the Romans for disturbing the peace by creating what was close to a riot at the temple, and the Romans would likely arrest him. But if Jesus says his authority over the temple is from God, they will likely charge him with blasphemy. So, either answer could put Jesus in hot water.

- C. Jesus is well aware of their intent and the possible consequences of whichever answer he might give. He probably had anticipated this reaction from the Jewish leaders, and he had his response ready. He turned the trap on them. He said he would answer their question if they would first answer his. “The baptism of John, did it come from heaven or was it of human origin?” The Jewish leaders clearly hadn't anticipated this question from Jesus, so they had to confer among themselves before responding. They quickly realized that if they attributed it to human origin they would probably have a riot on their hands from the people who were convinced that John was a prophet. On the other hand, if they said it was from heaven, Jesus would demand to know why they didn't believe him. So, their response was one that is repeated nowhere else in scripture by them. They said, “We don't know.” Jesus' response was, “Then I won't answer your question either.” It was a stalemate and the Jewish leaders were in no position to force an answer from Jesus.

LXXVIII. Luke 20:9-19 The parable of the wicked tenants

- A. The next question comes from Jesus. It is, “What will the owner do?” And it comes at the end of the parable of the wicked tenants. Before we get into the details of this parable, it's important to realize this parable has strong echoes of the song of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7 (**Read it**) and the questioners would have been familiar with it.
- B. With that background, it's quite clear who each of the characters in the parable represents. A man (God) who owns a vineyard leases it to some tenant farmers (Israel). When the harvest comes, he sends slaves (the prophets) to collect his portion

of the fruit. The farmers beat the slaves and sent them away (as Israel routinely persecuted the prophets). The farmer sends more slaves but they, too, are beaten and sent back empty handed. Finally, the owner (God) sends his son (Jesus), assuming the farmers will respect him. When the farmers see the son coming they apparently assume the owner had died and believe that if they kill the son the vineyard will be theirs. So, they brutally kill the son.

- C. Jesus concludes the parable with the question, “What will the owner of the vineyard do to them?” In my imagination I see Jesus pausing and looking at the Jewish leaders for some understanding on their part before he answers his own question. “He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” The Jewish leaders are caught up in this story, at least in part because they recognize the parable’s similarity to the song of the vineyard which foretold the Jews being enslaved and carried off into captivity by the Babylonians somewhere around 590 B.C. The Jewish leaders respond somewhat like moviegoers so caught up in the story they shout at the screen, “Heaven forbid!” By this, they meant this would never happen.
- D. Hearing their response, Jesus asks, “What then does this text mean?” And he cites Psalm 118:22. “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” This was a psalm with which the Jewish leaders were familiar; it presented the Messiah as the great stumbling stone. The image of the stumbling stone comes from a tradition that one of the stones intended for the temple was initially rejected, but it ended up being used as the chief cornerstone, the most visible stone in the temple. In verse 18, Jesus presents the two possibilities of encountering this Messianic stone. One can stumble over it and be broken—in the sense of recognizing our own sinfulness, which is foundational to becoming a follower of Jesus. The alternative is the judgment that will fall on those who refuse to accept Jesus’ saving grace.
- E. Verse 19 tells us that the Jewish leaders realized the parable had been told against them, and they were ready to take Jesus into custody then. However, Jerusalem was then filled with people who were convinced Jesus was at least a prophet, if not the Messiah, who was about to become their king, and the Jewish leaders knew a riot

would break out if they arrested him. They knew they had to find some way to arrest Jesus when the crowds were not around.

LXXIX. Luke 20:20-26 The question about paying taxes

- A. The questions intended to trap Jesus continue in these verses. And this question is posed by what Luke refers to as “spies,” which apparently means they could not be immediately identified as one of the Pharisees, scribes, or other groups that were trying to get rid of Jesus. In other words, they were on a clandestine mission of pretending to be righteous and only seeking the truth, when their true intent was to goad Jesus into a political misstep that would result in his being arrested by the Romans who would take him before Pontius Pilate who was then in Jerusalem to keep the peace during Passover. So, this is a secular trap rather than a religious one.
- B. They first offer insincere praise for Jesus before springing the trap question on him: “Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” They think they have him cornered because if he says *yes*, the people will immediately turn against him, and the Zealots would probably put him on their hit list. If he says *no*, *don't pay the taxes*, they would immediately report him to the Romans who would arrest him as an insurrectionist.
- C. Again, Jesus anticipates their question, and he is ready with a confounding response. He asks for a Roman denarius, the type of coin used to pay the Roman taxes, and asks, “Whose image and whose inscription does it have?” The image was that of the emperor, which they acknowledged. The key to understanding Jesus’ response, however, is the inscription. It would have said, “divine Caesar,” or “Caesar our savior.” Jesus’ response was, “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” This quote is often used to support the idea that a Christian has a duty to support the state, a maxim that is supported elsewhere in scripture. However, this response by Jesus can also be interpreted to mean that nothing is owed to an emperor who claims to be divine. In any event, the trap they thought would ensnare Jesus proved harmless; Jesus has once again silenced his opponents.

LXXX. Luke 20:27-40 Whose wife will she be in the resurrection

- A. The final question to Jesus in this chapter comes from the Sadducees, and to understand just how cynical the question was, we need to understand something about them. They were an aristocratic party formed in the century before Jesus' birth. They were well connected politically; a significant portion of the Sanhedrin Court came from the Sadducees, including the high priest. They were not anticipating the coming of the Messiah as the Pharisees were. The only scriptures they considered authoritative were the first five books authored by Moses. They rejected the existence of angels, and they denied there was any life after death. This life is all there was in their view. Keep this in mind as we consider the duplicitous question they posed.
- B. The question is based upon a provision in the Mosaic law that required a man to marry the widow of his brother if the brother died without a son. Any son born to the woman by the brother would be considered the son of her first husband, thereby continuing his lineage (See, Deut 25:5-10). Since the Sadducees considered the Books of Moses to be authoritative, they would have believed in enforcing this provision. The question, however, was intended by them to make the belief in the resurrection and an afterlife look silly. The question pertained to a woman who married a man with six brothers. After the first husband died childless, she married the six brothers in turn without having a son by any of them. So, in the afterlife whose wife would she be?
- C. Jesus' response is that there is no marriage in the afterlife. However, what Jesus takes dead aim at is dispelling their belief that there is no resurrection. To do this, he quotes from Exodus, also part of the Torah, which they accepted. He cites the story of the burning bush in Exodus, chapter 3 where God refers to himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Since they all are alive to God, they are not dead, but living. This was not a statement the Sadducees could disagree with since it was based on their own scriptures, so the Sadducees were silenced. Even the scribes and Pharisees liked Jesus' answer because it affirmed the resurrection, which they strongly believed in. Luke tells us they said, "Teacher, you have responded well."

LXXXI. Luke 20:41-47; 21:1-4 How can the Messiah be David's son

- A. After being presented with so many questions the Jewish leaders thought would catch Jesus in a trap, Jesus decides to pose a question to them. A favorite rabbinic title for the Messiah was “son of David.” This title came from the promise in II Samuel 7:11-16 that the Messiah would be a direct descendant of David. The question Jesus posed to them was, “If David calls the Messiah Lord, how can he be his son?” (Psalm 110:1). The question left the Jewish leaders dumbfounded; Luke records no response from them. Although Jesus doesn’t answer his own question, it seems to me he was challenging them to consider who the Messiah was. The Jews were looking for a warrior king Messiah who would restore Israel to its former glory, expel the Romans, and reign from Jerusalem. They were not anticipating God himself coming to establish a spiritual kingdom that would change the entire world. The fact David himself called the Messiah Lord should have led them to consider this.
- B. After incurring so many attempts by the scribes to catch and destroy Jesus, he has had enough from them. He tells the people bluntly that they should beware of the scribes and not imitate them. He criticized them for seeking places of honor and holding themselves up as righteous men, offering long prayers for show. They had exalted themselves, but Jesus said they will receive “the greater condemnation.”
- C. By contrast, as it so happens, Jesus observed people putting their gifts into the temple treasury, led by the rich who often made a show of their contributions. However, it was not the rich that Jesus commended, but rather a poor widow who only put in two small copper coins which had relatively little value. But it was all she had. Jesus said that the rich had contributed out of their abundance, but she had contributed out of her poverty “all she had to live on.” I don’t believe Jesus was creating a model for all to follow by someone giving all they have to live on to the church. But he was making the point that God notices the degree of commitment one makes to God by what he or she gives. The rich may be giving a small portion of their wealth by their large gift, whereas the poor may be giving all they can possibly afford by even a small gift. This did not go unnoticed to Jesus, and it still doesn’t.

LXXXII. LUKE 21:5-24 The destruction of the temple/Jerusalem foretold

- A. It’s still the week leading up to Passover; the disciples are with Jesus in Jerusalem, as are great crowds of people who have come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration.

As these verses begin, the disciples are standing in awe of the temple, which is not surprising. It was one of the wonders of the ancient world, known widely for its beauty and wealth. When they commented on this to Jesus, however, they got a response they didn't anticipate. He tells them bluntly that a day will come when the temple will be completely destroyed—"not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." This is what Jesus had a vision of as he approached Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

- B. Jesus' statement shocked the disciples, so they asked the same questions we would have asked: when will this happen, and what will be the sign it's about to happen? At this point, Jesus is not talking about the "end times." He is speaking only about the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in A.D. 40. He tells them not to be deceived; "Many will come claiming to be the Messiah (which happened); don't be alarmed by wars, rumors of wars, and rebellions. You will first be arrested and brought before the authorities because you are followers of mine. Don't worry about what you will say when questioned; I will give you the words at the time. You will even be betrayed by family and friends. But be faithful throughout all of this. By your endurance you will save your souls." Jesus is giving them fair warning of what they will face so they will be prepared.
- C. As to the sign that Jerusalem and the temple are about to be destroyed, he told them that when they see armies coming to surround Jerusalem they will know that destruction is near. When they see this about to happen, they should flee to the hills; those in the country should under no circumstances go back to Jerusalem. The conditions there will be horrendous. We know from the historian Josephus just how horrendous the conditions were, especially for women, as Jesus prophesied. People were so hungry cannibalism broke out. Most of the people captured after the city fell were crucified, and those that weren't were sold into slavery. The temple was torn down, with all of its gold, silver, and jewels carried off by the Romans, who also sacked the rest of the city. Enough loot was taken to pay for the construction of the Colosseum in Rome. Jesus said that Jerusalem would be trampled on until the time of the Gentiles has been fulfilled. And, in fact, Jerusalem was not in Jewish control again until 1948 when Israel was declared a nation and given the Holy Land. Notably, there were few, if any, Christians in Jerusalem when it was destroyed

because they heeded Jesus' warning and fled to the hills when they saw the Roman army approaching.

- D. A historical note to this episode is that most of the zealots and others who led the uprising against the Romans, fled to Masada, which is in the desert area of Judea. The Romans then surrounded Masada and built ramps up to overrun it. Just before the Romans were about to overrun Masada, all of the Jews there—men, women, and children—committed suicide rather than surrender to the Romans. To this day, Jewish children from around the world are taken to Masada as they become of age to remind them what their ancestors have endured because they are Jewish.

LXXXIII. Luke 21:25-38 The second coming

- A. Jesus has just answered the disciples' first question about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, all of which events would occur within 40 years or so of the date Jesus spoke these words. At verse 25, however, Jesus pivots to discussing end times. Luke does not record a direct question from the disciples at this point about the end times, but Matthew does—see Matt. 24:3. "What is the sign of your coming and the end of the age?" So, Jesus is answering two different questions in this chapter.
- B. Jesus is quite clear that his second coming will be even more shocking than what will happen to Jerusalem. There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars, as well as in the seas. Everyone will be able to see these events. It will be a time of great fear about what is coming upon the earth. In chapter 17 of Luke Jesus also described those days, and warned those on the rooftops not to go down to collect things to take with you. Instead, Jesus says again, when these things happen, lift up your heads "because your redemption is drawing near." When you do, he tells them, "You will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."
- C. In verse 29, Jesus transitions from discussing specific events that are a sign of what's coming to giving them a parable to warn them. It's the parable of the fig tree. It was then spring, and he told them you recognize that when the fig tree and other trees sprout leaves, summer is about to arrive. Likewise, when you see the things I have

warned you about, you know that these events are about to occur, and the kingdom of God is near.

- D. The comment in verse 32 that these things will occur within this generation has been subject to several different interpretations. The first is that Jesus was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, which did take place within the lifetime of most of those present. The other most frequent interpretation is that “this generation” refers to the entire human race. So, in this interpretation Jesus is saying that the human race will not pass away until his second coming which will usher in the day of judgment and the end of the world. My inclination is to follow the first interpretation.

- E. Verses 34-36 clearly refer to the second coming because those events affect all of mankind. He warns them, as he has previously in some of his parables, that we should always be alert and watching, for these events will occur at a time the world will not be expecting. We should pray that we will be prepared for that day when we will stand before Jesus on judgment day.

- F. This chapter concludes with Luke informing us that Jesus would retreat from the city at night, but would return early the next morning to teach the crowds who swarmed to him in the temple. As we will see in the next chapter, however, the Jewish leaders were plotting to kill Jesus.

LXXXIV. Luke 22:1-6 The plot to kill Jesus

- A. As we have noted previously, the chief priests and scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus and try him. The chief priests were mostly Sadducees, and the scribes were mostly Pharisees, and they disagreed on many issues. However, they came together in a plan to put Jesus to death. They just had to find a way to do it away from the view of the people because they believed Jesus was the Messiah, or at least a prophet.

- B. Their breakthrough came when one of Jesus’ own disciples approached the chief priests to inquire what they would give him if he betrayed Jesus over to them. Why

Judas would do this is beyond our understanding. Keep in mind, he had witnessed all of Jesus' miracles; he had performed miracles himself along with the other disciples when Jesus sent them out. The only explanation is that given by Luke. He tells us "Satan entered into Judas." But keep in mind, Satan cannot enter anyone uninvited. For some reason, Judas had become disenchanted with Jesus, and was willing to betray him. The chief priests offered 30 pieces of silver, according to Matthew, which was the price of a slave pursuant to the law in Exodus 21:32. And for that measly sum, which was worth about \$5000 in today's dollars, Judas betrayed Jesus. He then began looking for an opportunity to lead them to Jesus out of the spotlight.

LXXXV. Luke 22:7-13 Preparation for Passover

- A. It's finally time for the actual Passover meal, which the Galileans celebrated on Thursday night (which would be Friday for Jews because a new day started at sundown), whereas the Judean Jews celebrated on Friday night (which would be Saturday, the sabbath, to them). Jesus assigns the preparation of the Passover meal to Peter and John, so they set out to buy the bitter herbs, the unleavened bread, the wine, and the lamb. And they had to find the place to have the meal. Jesus tells them to look for a man carrying a water jar, which would be unusual since it was usually women who carried water jars. This was apparently a pre-arranged sign, like finding the donkey for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. They find the man and are led to the upper room where they prepared the Passover meal.

LXXXVI. Luke 22:14-38 The Lord's Supper

- A. Once the meal is prepared and they are gathered in the upper room, Jesus took his place at the table—which would have been a low table at which they did not sit, but rather reclined around it. Jesus tells them he has been eager to celebrate this Passover with them because he will not celebrate it again until all is fulfilled in the kingdom of God, referring to his death and resurrection. He takes the bread, breaks it and tells them it is his body, broken for them. He takes the wine and tells them to drink the cup that is poured out for them as the new covenant in his blood. They are to always observe this sacrament in memory of him. It's a solemn and emotional moment for all of them. The pressure on Jesus by now in view of what lay ahead was crushing, and the disciples were not quite sure what was happening, although they must have known that something profound was happening.

- B. As they are trying to process all of this, Jesus dumbfounds them by announcing that one of them is going to betray him. Judas has just participated in the first Lord's supper, and he sits there knowing he will betray Jesus, and knowing that Jesus knows it, but he says nothing, knowing that if the other disciples knew he would betray Jesus—and them—he would not get out of the room alive. From the text, and the other gospels, it's clear that none of the other disciples suspected Judas. In fact, he was so respected that he kept the common purse from which their expenses and gifts were made. John's gospel tells us that Jesus then told Judas to do what he had to do quickly. But even that did not suggest to the disciples that Judas was the betrayer. John tells us they thought he had left to buy what they needed for the festival or that he was to make a gift to the poor. They did not realize that Judas was the betrayer until they saw Judas leading the temple guards to Jesus at the Mount of Olives that same night, which must have shocked all of them, except Jesus.
- C. What immediately follows is one of the most baffling episodes in all the scriptures to me. The disciples have all been with Jesus going on three years. They have seen miracle after miracle. They have seen Jesus' concern for the poor and disadvantaged. They have heard the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain, and heard the parables, hearing repeatedly that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. Three of them were even present for the transfiguration. Yet, at this very moment at the Last Supper, a dispute breaks out among them over who will be the greatest among them. It's a confounding situation. Remember, they had had this argument earlier in Luke, chapter 9. Jesus is so disappointed in this that he did something unthinkable to the disciples. He took on the role of a servant and washed their feet, the most menial task any slave could perform. Only John relates this fact, and he does so only some 60 years or more after the fact when he writes his gospel. Then Jesus explains what he has done and reminds them that they are to be servant leaders, not ones who exalt themselves. In verses 28-30, in an apparent effort to address their concerns over their role in the kingdom of God, Jesus reassures them that they will eat and drink at his table in his kingdom; they will also judge the twelve tribes of Israel.
- D. In verses 31-34, there is an abrupt change of focus to Peter. Perhaps this occurs after Peter initially refused to let Jesus wash his feet, as related in John's gospel. If so, these words are a warning to Peter. Jesus tells Peter that Satan has asked to sift all of

the disciples like wheat, but Jesus has prayed specifically for Peter that his own faith may not fail, and that once he has turned back—which seems to anticipate Peter’s denial of even knowing Jesus—he would be able to strengthen the brothers. Peter responds by saying he ready to go to prison or to death with Jesus. It is only then that Jesus bluntly tells Peter he will deny Jesus three times before the cock crows that very day.

- E. In verses 35-38, Jesus reminds them of the instructions he gave the 12 and then the 70 in chapters 9 and 10 of Luke. They were to take nothing with them. He asks, “Did you lack for anything?” And, of course, they did not. Now, however, Jesus tells them they should take provisions with them, and they should buy a sword. It’s a puzzling statement, Jesus—the Prince of Peace—telling them to buy a sword. But then he quotes a prophecy from Isaiah 53:12 that says he “was counted among the rebels.” Somehow, it all fits together. Although the law forbid any of them to be armed during Passover, they have two swords among them. Jesus says it is enough. Puzzling as these verses are, I have read one commentary that seems to make sense. When they were first sent out, the disciples were depending upon Jewish hospitality. They would have avoided the treacherous Gentile Inns. In the future, however, they would be sent out among the Gentiles who did not have the same approach to hospitality as the Jews did, and they needed to be able to protect themselves. I don’t know if this is the correct interpretation, but it is the one that seems most logical to me.

LXXXVII. Luke 22:39-53 Jesus’ prayer/arrest at Mt. of Olives

- A. Jesus and his disciples have now left the upper room; they have departed the city of Jerusalem, crossed the Kidron Valley, and ascended the Mount of Olives where Jesus often took his disciples to be alone with them. Given what we have read about the meeting in the upper room in the gospels of John and Luke, this must have been a time of inner turmoil for all of them. Jesus, of course, knows what lies ahead; the disciples are unsure, but it all seems foreboding to them based upon Jesus’s comments. Indeed, Luke tells us they have so much grief that they were unable to stay awake while they tried to pray.
- B. When they arrive, Jesus tells them to pray that they may not come to the time of trial, and he then went further into the woods with only Peter, James, and John

accompanying him, as Matthew's gospel tells us. There, as Jesus began to pray, the full impact of what he was about to face almost overwhelmed him. Luke tells us he asked that God "remove this cup from him." In other words, find some other way to accomplish the redemption of mankind. But he quickly added, "not my will but yours be done." Only Luke tells us that an angel appeared to strengthen him. It's important for us to understand *why* Jesus needed strengthening at this time. First, he was facing physical death of the most horrendous kind—death on a Roman cross. As bad as that was, he faced something that for him would have been even worse. He was about to take on the sin of all mankind for all time. As Paul later said, God "made him *to be sin* who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (II Cor. 5:21) Do you get that? On the cross, Jesus actually became a sinful person—guilty of our sin, not his—so that he could bear the punishment we sinners deserved. The enormity of that is beyond our comprehension, but it's no wonder that Luke tells us "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground."

- C. Do you recall when we studied Hebrews that the author assured the readers that we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses and circumstances because Jesus has been tested in every respect as we have. This episode on the Mount of Olives is the high point of that testing. He has been tested beyond anything we will ever face, so we can go to him in prayer with full assurance that he understands and can relate to our circumstances. I don't know about you, but knowing that gives me great comfort.
- D. Jesus returns to find the disciples asleep from their grief. He awakens them and urges them to continue to pray. But even as he speaks, a large crowd of the temple police approach, carrying weapons and torches. And the crowd is being led by one of their own—Judas Iscariot. Put yourself in the disciples' shoes. All of the threats against Jesus that have been made recently have now become reality. The police are here to arrest Jesus, and, unbelievably, they are being led by Judas, a trusted member of their group. The shock of this must have stunned the disciples because Luke records no effort to protect Jesus from arrest until after Judas has approached Jesus and greeted him with a kiss. Jesus' rhetorical question to Judas—"Is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man"—brought the disciples to the realization of what is happening. One of the disciples—Peter—strikes Malchus, the slave of the high

priest, cutting off his ear. But Jesus immediately stops any further such efforts and heals Malchus. Jesus doesn't let the moment pass without commenting on the fact they have treated him like a bandit, coming after him with swords and clubs, when he was available to be arrested at any time as he taught publicly in the temple. But, he noted, this was their hour and the hour of the powers of darkness.

LXXXVIII. Luke 22:54-62 Peter denies Jesus

- A. We know from the other gospels that Jesus was taken first to the home of Annas, the former high priest and father-in-law of Caiaphas, the current high priest, for a highly unlawful preliminary hearing. Then he was taken to the home of Caiaphas, who had assembled the Sanhedrin Court there for an illegal trial in the middle of the night. It is when they are at the home of Caiaphas that Peter and another disciple, probably John, are in the courtyard, eager to find out what would happen to Jesus.
- B. It's in that courtyard that Peter denied Jesus three times. We should note, however, that it took a great deal of courage for Peter to even be there. The events of the week leading up to this point made it clear that Jesus was a marked man as far as the Jewish authorities were concerned, and his disciples were therefore at risk as well. Nevertheless, Peter had just sworn to Jesus that very night that he would follow Jesus even to death, whereupon Jesus had warned Peter that he would deny him three times before the cock crowed. And he did. Matthew even tells us that Peter swore an oath that he didn't know Jesus. (Matt. 26:74). Just as he denied Jesus for the third time, the cock crowed, and Jesus turned to look at Peter who then remembered what Jesus had said. It must have been the low point of Peter's entire life. Jesus' words flowed back over Peter, and he instantly remembered his vow never to deny Jesus, even if it meant death. Have you ever had a time in your life when you were extremely disappointed in yourself for some reason? You couldn't believe you had behaved so badly by doing or saying something or failing to do or say something? Magnify that by five or ten times and that must be what Peter was going through. He had just denied—not once but three times—the man he knew to be the Lord of the universe, despite just vowing never to do so. Luke tells us simply that Peter “went out and wept bitterly.”

- C. But we can't leave Peter there. Compare him to Judas Iscariot who also betrayed Jesus that night. When Judas came to his senses, he tried to give the money back he received for betraying Jesus; then went out and hanged himself. In short, Judas tried to fix things and when he realized he couldn't, he took his own life. Peter, on the other hand, realized he couldn't fix things, and he repented. On the day Jesus arose from the dead, we know that Jesus appeared to Peter. Although we don't know specifically what they said, in my imagination I see Peter tearfully seeking forgiveness from Jesus and Jesus graciously restoring Peter to fellowship with him and telling Peter he loved him and forgave him.

LXXXIX. Luke 22:63-71 The Jewish trial

- A. Luke's gospel gives a very abbreviated version of the trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin Court. However, it is obvious it's a kangaroo court. In verses 63-65 we are told that those holding Jesus began beating him and insulting him, even though he had been convicted of nothing at that time.
- B. Luke's gospel does not mention the false testimony the chief priests put on to try to provide some legitimate cover for convicting Jesus, as Matthew's gospel does. Instead, Luke goes directly to the point in the trial where the high priest—Caiaphas—demands that Jesus tell them whether he claimed to be the Messiah or not, despite the fact Jewish law did not permit conviction on the defendant's testimony alone, and the defendant had the right to remain silent. When Jesus admits that he is the Messiah, they bring the trial to an abrupt end by convicting Jesus by acclamation of blasphemy, without any opportunity for Jesus to present a defense.
- C. The conviction of blasphemy carried the death penalty under Jewish law. However, Pontius Pilate had previously declared that the Jews could not impose the death penalty for crimes under Jewish law without his consent. The Jews well knew Pilate would not permit the death sentence to be carried out for breach of Jewish religious laws. Therefore, they needed to charge Jesus with violations of Roman law to obtain the death penalty they sought.

XC. Luke 23:1-12 Jesus before Pilate/Herod

- A. As mentioned, once they convicted Jesus under Jewish law, the chief priests had to come up with charges against Jesus under Roman law because they doubted that Pilate would impose the death penalty on their conviction of blasphemy alone. So, they asserted the charge that Jesus claimed to be a king, which was essentially a charge of treason or insurrection. Someone claiming to be a king without being appointed by Rome was making a political claim to be the legitimate authority rather than the Romans. They also claimed Jesus had forbidden them to pay taxes to the emperor, which was a cynical claim for them to make in view of the episode in chapter 20 where they attempted to get Jesus to make exactly that statement, but he didn't.
- B. The only charge that Pilate took seriously was the charge that Jesus claimed to be a king. It was a charge that he had to take seriously, or the chief priests would report him to Rome, as he well knew. Luke's gospel simply tells us that Pilate asked Jesus whether he was the king of the Jews, to which Jesus replied that he was. What isn't included in Luke's gospel is what we are told in John's gospel, namely that Pilate took Jesus into his headquarters and interrogated him privately. There, Jesus said he was indeed a king, but his kingdom was not of this world. That eliminated any threat to Rome, and Pilate went out and declared that Jesus was innocent, a fact that Luke reinforces over and over.
- C. This, of course, displeased the Jewish leaders, and they expanded their charges against Jesus to say he was stirring up a rebellion throughout Judea and Galilee. This led Pilate to ask whether Jesus was from Galilee. Upon being told that he was, Pilate realized he had grounds to get this messy situation off his hands. He declared that since Jesus was a Galilean, and Galilee was Herod Antipas' jurisdiction, Herod should judge Jesus. In short, he ordered a change of venue. Remember, this is the same Herod who put Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, to death, and the same man who took his brother's wife to be his own wife. Pilate wanted to get Jesus' case off his own docket because he knew that unless he convicted Jesus the Jews would report him to the emperor, which they had already done once, and Pilate was rebuked for his previous actions. A second complaint could cause him to lose his job as governor of Judea. Sending Jesus to Herod, however, should have never taken place since Pilate had already found Jesus innocent. That should have been the end of the legal

proceedings against Jesus, but he was sent to Herod for political reasons, not for legal reasons.

- D. Herod was in Jerusalem at the time for the Passover celebration, and he was happy to see Jesus. Luke tells us that Herod had been eager to see Jesus for a long time because he had heard of Jesus' miracles, and he wanted Jesus to perform a miracle for him. Of course, Jesus refused. Instead, Jesus was questioned by the chief priests and scribes, and by Herod himself, to which Jesus made no reply, as was his right under Jewish law. When he recognized there was no proof of any violation of the law by Jesus, and that Jesus was not going to respond to any of the allegations against him, Herod mocked Jesus, treated him with contempt, and dressed him in a kingly robe before sending him back to Pilate. Luke tells us Pilate and Herod became friends that day, despite having been enemies previously.
- E. An interesting fact about Jesus' appearance before Herod is that it is reported by none of the other gospels. We know that Luke was not a first-hand observer of any of these events, so the question arises, where did Luke get this information? We can't know for sure, but Luke told us in Luke 8:3 that one of the women who followed Jesus was the wife of a man named Chuza who was the manager of Herod's household. Her name was Joanna. She may have even been present in the background of the hearing before Herod, or she may have learned of what happened from her husband. We know Joanna was a committed disciple of Jesus because in Luke 24:10 we find that Joanna was one of the women who went to Jesus' tomb on Easter morning and found the tomb to be empty. So, she is the most likely source for the appearance of Jesus before Herod.

XCI. Luke 23:13-25 Jesus sentenced to death

- A. As we have just seen, Herod refused to accept jurisdiction over Jesus to try him; instead, he sent Jesus back to Pilate. Pilate then summoned the Jewish chief priests and leaders and reminded them he had found Jesus innocent of the charges against him. He also pointed out that Herod had found Jesus innocent, confirming Pilate's own judgment. Despite this, Pilate said he would have Jesus flogged before releasing him. Flogging was no tap on the wrist. Some people died from flogging before ever getting to the cross. Having found Jesus innocent, ordering him to be flogged was not

in accord with Roman law, but Pilate is trying to throw a bone to the Jews to satisfy their desire to have Jesus put to death. Again, he is doing this for political reasons, not out of a sense of justice

- B. This decision by Pilate just incensed what was by now close to a mob of angry Jews. Matthew's gospel tells us that it was at this point that Pilate tried to appease them by reminding them of his practice to release one prisoner during Passover. There was a convicted murderer named Barabbas that Pilate thought they would rather see put on a cross than Jesus. But this backfired on Pilate. The crowd was so intent on Jesus being crucified that they demanded that Barabbas be released, and Jesus be crucified. Pilate again reminded the Jewish leaders he had found no grounds for finding Jesus guilty, but they continued to demand Jesus be crucified. John's gospel tells us that the final warning to Pilate by the Jews was their statement that they had no king but the emperor. In other words, it was a not-so-veiled threat that if Pilate didn't find Jesus guilty and send him to the cross, they would file a complaint against Pilate with the emperor that he refused to deal appropriately with someone rebelling against the emperor by claiming to be a king the emperor had not appointed. At this point, Pilate caved to the political pressure, released Barabbas, and ordered Jesus to be crucified.

XCII. Luke 23:26-43 The crucifixion of Jesus

- A. Once the verdict was rendered against Jesus, he was required to carry his own cross to the place where he would be crucified. However, Jesus has had no sleep since Wednesday night; he has been flogged, which was such a severe beating many people died from it alone; and he has been through the emotional turmoil of trials before Jewish and Roman courts. He was no longer in any condition to carry a heavy cross. So, the Roman soldiers exercised their right of impressment to require a Jewish man named Simon, from Cyrene, a Roman province in North Africa, to carry Jesus' cross. This man Simon probably was not even a follower of Jesus at this time, but Mark's gospel tells us his sons were Alexander and Rufus, who became two of the leaders in the early church. No doubt, carrying Jesus' cross had a profound impact on Simon, as well as his sons
- B. There was a large and mixed group of people following Jesus to the cross, some jeering and some—mostly women—wailing for him. In verses 28-31, Jesus tells

them not to weep for him but rather for themselves and their children as he describes the hellish destruction of Jerusalem which would happen because they had rejected Jesus and his message.

- C. In verses 32-36 a series of events happen that had been foretold in the Old Testament regarding the Messiah, all of which are being fulfilled: **1)** Luke 23:32: Jesus is crucified between two criminals (Is. 53:12) **2)** Luke 23:33: Jesus is crucified, a form of death not used when the prophecy was made (Zech. 12:10) **3)** Luke 23:34: They cast lots for his clothing (Ps. 22:18) **4)** Luke 23:35: The people standing by mock and sneer (Ps. 22:7; Ps. 109:25) **5)** Luke 23:26: The soldiers offer him sour wine (Ps. 69:21).
- D. The sign over Jesus was “King of the Jews,” which John’s gospel tells us upset the Jewish leaders, but Pilate refused to change it. One of the criminals crucified with Jesus picked up on the sign and mocked Jesus, saying “If you are the Messiah, save yourself and us.” Luke also tells us the Jewish leaders were also there, mocking Jesus. Unexpectedly, the other criminal next to Jesus, rebuked the first criminal and recognized Jesus as innocent, unlike the two of them. Then he essentially prayed the sinner’s prayer, saying “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus’ response must have made the criminal’s death a little easier. He said, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Once again, we see the pattern we have seen throughout Luke. The Jewish leaders who should have known who Jesus was, didn’t—they were mocking him even as he died. On the other hand, the criminal being crucified with Jesus, was someone you would not expect to recognize who Jesus was, but he did, and the day of his death was the day he entered Paradise.

XCIII. Luke 23:44-56 The death and burial of Jesus

- A. What happens next had been foretold by the prophet Amos (Amos 8:9-10) (Read it). Luke tells us that about noon darkness covered the land until about 3:00pm. Then, an invisible hand rent the curtain in the temple which separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple, indicating that worshipers would thereafter have direct access to the Father.

- B. The moment of the conclusion of Jesus' earthly ministry had finally arrived. But in the midst of the horror and despair experienced by his followers as Jesus was dying on the cross, what we hear from Jesus is not a despondent murmur of defeat, but rather a shout of victory. John's gospel tells us Jesus said, "It is finished," meaning all he had come to accomplish had been completed. He had come to redeem mankind from our sinfulness and our rebellion against God by making himself an atonement for our sins. To do that, he had to live a sinless life; he had to teach his disciples and followers what God expects of us as his children; and he had to model what a life lived in perfect harmony with our Father looks like. Had he failed, what our world would look like today—if it were still here at all—is unimaginable. And all the forces of hell were arrayed against him to prevent him from fulfilling his mission. That is why he said, triumphantly, "It is finished." Luke tells us he then cried with a loud voice, as one celebrating the greatest victory in human history would, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." In other words, "I'm coming home." He didn't die of exhaustion or loss of blood. He willingly gave up his spirit to his Father who had sent him.
- C. How do we know this is how it happened? The Roman centurion who was there was so moved by how Jesus died that he announced, "Surely this man was righteous," not something you would expect to hear from a centurion about a convicted criminal. Every time a centurion is mentioned in the New Testament he is portrayed in a positive light. Although centurions were hardened leaders of men in combat, they are presented as men of integrity. Any centurion had seen many men die, including many dying on a cross. But this centurion had never seen anyone die like Jesus did, and his words reflect that difference.
- D. The manner of Jesus' death affected not only the centurion, but also the crowds that were there. Luke told us earlier that some in the crowds had mocked Jesus. Now, Luke tells us that "all who had gathered for this spectacle" went away beating their breast, which was a sign of mourning in that part of the world even to this day. Luke also tells us that among Jesus' followers there were the women from Galilee who had watched all of these things from a distance. Undoubtedly, these women were some of the witnesses who told Luke what happened.

- E. Normally, when someone died on a cross his body was left for the dogs and birds to eat. The Romans wanted the process to be as horrible as possible to act as a deterrent to anyone disobeying Roman law. Given the nature of the trial against Jesus, with all of the Jewish hierarchy arrayed against him, it was unlikely that anyone would be bold enough to seek permission to give Jesus a proper burial. What was even more unlikely was that a member of the Great Sanhedrin, the very same court that had just convicted Jesus of blasphemy, would be bold enough to do so. That is why Luke specifically tells us that Joseph of Arimathea, a righteous man who was a member of the Sanhedrin, went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. He was undoubtedly a Sadducee, but Luke tells us he did not agree with the council when they convicted Jesus. He was joined in the burial by Nicodemus, who we know was a Pharisee. These two groups—Sadducees and Pharisees—rarely agreed with each other, but in Jesus' death, these two come together publicly to bury Jesus. It took great courage for them to do so.
- F. Jesus was buried in a tomb owned by Joseph, undoubtedly a tomb for his own burial. Normally, the body of a dead person would be treated with spices and ointments before putting the body in the tomb. However, it was now late afternoon of the day before Passover and the sabbath, which would begin at sundown that same day. So, there was no time to prepare the body. Once sundown arrived, it was sabbath and no work could be done, including preparing the body. The women followed and saw where the body was placed in the tomb. They also saw the large stone rolled across the tomb before leaving. They planned to return on Sunday morning with their spices and ointments, which John tells us Nicodemus had provided, to prepare the body of Jesus in accord with Jewish custom. It was undoubtedly the most miserable sabbath any of them had ever experienced.

XCIV. Luke 24:1-12 The resurrection of Jesus

- A. One of the themes we have seen throughout the gospel of Luke is amazement, and that amazement is more pronounced in the resurrection than anywhere else in his gospel. To fully understand it, we must recognize that *no one* expected Jesus to rise from the dead, despite the fact he had told the disciples repeatedly that he would. For some reason, Jesus' words about his resurrection just bounced off their minds without taking hold. The women who went to the tomb early on Easter morning were on a mission to prepare a *dead* body for a proper Jewish burial. They had no expectations that Jesus would be risen. The women were terrified when the angels appeared to

them and apparently mystified when they told the women Jesus had risen, and that was why the tomb was empty. The angels even reminded the women what Jesus had told them about why these things must take place; he must be crucified but would arise on the third day.

- B. The women—whom Luke identifies—hasten back to tell the disciples what they have seen and heard from the angels. Even though the women told them what the angels said, which included Jesus’ words that he would arise on the third day, the disciples don’t believe them! Jesus’ own disciples had no expectations that he would rise from the tomb. Luke says the women’s words seemed like an idle tale to the disciples. The term Luke used was a medical term meaning the disciples thought the women were *delirious*. Only Peter and John were curious enough to run to the tomb to see if there was any truth to what the women said. Even when they found the tomb empty, and even though Luke tells us they were *amazed*, they still couldn’t bring themselves to believe Jesus was alive.

XCV. Luke 24:13-35 Jesus appears on the road to Emmaus

- A. One of the things we must remember about the gospels is that none of them alone gives a complete picture of Jesus’ life and ministry, including the resurrection appearances. To have a more complete picture, we have to pull together the accounts in all of the gospels. Although we know that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene on Easter morning, and later that same day to Peter, the first appearance Luke describes is to two followers of Jesus who were not part of the original twelve disciples.
- B. This episode begins with the two followers of Jesus walking home to Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem, sad and distraught by the events of the past few days, and, apparently, trying to make sense of them. Suddenly, Jesus came along side them, although they don’t recognize him, at least in part because, like all the others, they had absolutely no expectations that Jesus would rise from the tomb. Jesus asked what they are discussing, and they were surprised Jesus didn’t know what had taken place in Jerusalem that week. So, they told him briefly what had occurred, including the appearance of the angels to the women telling them Jesus was alive. Still, they didn’t believe Jesus was alive; verse 17 says they were “sad.”

- C. Jesus then gave them a mild rebuke before explaining to them all that was foretold about the Messiah in scripture and how it had all been fulfilled in his life, although they didn't yet recognize it was Jesus who was speaking to them. Luke tells us Jesus "interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures." Why in the world Luke didn't give us a summary of what Jesus said is a mystery, but I can only surmise that by the time Luke wrote his gospel, what Jesus said that day had been explained in the various epistles written by Peter, Paul, and others.
- D. When they reached their destination, the two encouraged Jesus to stay with them, and he agreed. To me, it's symbolic that it was in the breaking of bread that whatever veil had prevented them from recognizing Jesus was lifted, and they recognized him. As soon as they did, Jesus vanished from their sight. I love their response to each other: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us." They immediately headed back to Jerusalem, even though it was nearly night, to bring the good news to the disciples. When they got there, they learned that Jesus had already appeared to Peter, and this was enough to finally convince the disciples Jesus was indeed alive.

XCVI. LUKE 24:36-49 Jesus appears to his disciples/the ascension

- A. There must have been quite a buzz going on in the upper room where Luke tells us the disciples and their companions—which may have included the women from Galilee who followed Jesus—were joined by the two men from Emmaus as they related their experience of encountering Jesus earlier that day, which reinforced Peter's account of Jesus appearing to him. The transition from the depression and sadness of the cross and the end of their hopes and expectations regarding Jesus, to the realization all was not lost must have brought an excitement beyond anything any of them had ever experienced.
- B. Suddenly, in the midst of this excitement and newfound but tenuous hope regarding Jesus, he appeared in the midst of them, with an ordinary greeting, "Peace be with you." The fact they still couldn't believe Jesus was really alive is demonstrated by Luke's text: "They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost." Jesus showed them his hands and his feet, which bore the marks of the stakes

that nailed him to the cross, and he pointed out that ghosts don't have flesh and bones as he did. Even this apparently didn't fully convince some of them he was really back from the dead, so Jesus asked for something to eat, and they gave him a piece of broiled fish which he ate in their presence.

C. When people try to convince you that the gospel stories about Jesus are all made-up stories and fables, point out to them that no fable or fabricated stories present the good guys behaving as these followers did. This is an accurate account of real events occurring at a specific time and place in which ordinary people encountered the risen Lord with initial skepticism, but then with belief after their initial skepticism is overcome by the evidence. Keep in mind also that all but one of the disciples died a martyr's death, and none of them—not one—ever renounced his testimony of seeing Jesus alive after he died on the cross. It's compelling evidence that the accounts of these events found in scripture are historically accurate and reliable.

D. In addition to the two appearances by Jesus described in this gospel, there were other appearances listed in scripture. They include:

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|------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1. Mary Magdalene | Easter morning | Mark 16, John 20 |
| 2. 11 disciples | A week later | John 20 |
| 3. 7 disciples/Galilee | At daybreak, later | John 21 |
| 4. 11 disciples | Mountain/Galilee | Matt 28, Mark 16 |
| 5. Over 500 | Later | I Cor. 15 |
| 6. James | Later | I Cor. 15 |
| 7. Disciples | 40 days later | Luke 24, Acts 1 |

E. In verses 44-49, Jesus explained to them why he had to die as he did, and he enabled them to understand the scriptures. Much of what had been a mystery to them finally became clear. He also gave them their commission to be his witnesses, first to Jerusalem, then to the entire world once they had been empowered by the coming of the Holy Spirit. So, what had been the low point of their lives with all their hopes and

dreams shattered, in short order became the beginning of a new and exciting chapter not only in their own lives, but in the history of mankind.

- F. Verses 50-53 recount the ascension of Jesus, which is repeated in slightly more detail in the first chapter of Acts. One fact included in Acts that Luke did not include in his gospel is the appearance of the angels once Jesus had been taken up. They told the disciples that Jesus will return some day just as they saw him ascend into heaven. It's a promise we should always keep in the forefront of our minds. We live in the interim period between Jesus' incarnation and his return, which can occur at any time. It's an event we should eagerly anticipate and for which we should always be prepared.