

The Gospel of Luke

Year 2: Week 1 – Chapter 8 The Gerasene Demoniac

V34 *When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country.* The swineherds, the men in charge of the pigs, head to town with the news. There is no reason for them to remain in the field.

V35 *Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.* They return with a crowd and find the man in his right mind and with clothes on. This man's wretched condition included five miseries; 1.) the unclean spirits, 2.) living among the tombs, 3.) naked, 4.) a resident of the Decapolis, this Gentile region and 5.) living so close to this large herd of pigs. His outward appearance with clothes gives some hint to the change.

V36 *Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed.* How would we expect the people to respond? Are they happy the threat posed by this man has been removed? Seeing the man sane and sensible they are afraid.

V37 *Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned.* It is like the disciples in the boat who feared the winds and waves, but then realized they were sitting next to one more powerful than nature. They were terrified. Witnessing this man's new condition they begged Jesus to depart. The everyday routine of life had been shattered and they wanted the One who caused the disruption to leave. Jesus abides by the request.

V38 *The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying.* He begins to beg that he might come along. It might be that he does not know if he will have any place in this community. Might the loss of pigs leave resentment towards him? Jesus refused him.

V39 *“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.* He does just as Jesus directed him, becoming a missionary to this Gentile community. In the Gospel stories of Jesus' encounters with demoniacs, He is repeatedly telling the demons to be quiet. He is usually telling those who have been healed to do the same. We describe this as the 'Messianic Secret.' In the context of the questions about identity soon to come even the disciples who confess Jesus as Messiah do not understand His Messianic mission.

Within the gospels, there are many people reported to be followers. There are the twelve and when He sends disciples ahead of Him, there are the seventy. Here Jesus sends away a volunteer. If we connect the selection of the twelve with the representation of the 12 tribes of Israel following the Son of David this man's presence would create difficulties. Jesus' attitude and reaction to Gentiles is different than it is toward the Jews. In John 4 He tells the Samaritan woman that, "Salvation is from the Jews." Twice in Matthew, 10:6 and 15:24, Jesus describes His mission as, "To the lost sheep of the house of Israel." While He has many interactions with Gentiles, and heals many, it is only after Pentecost that the mission of the church extends beyond the chosen people.

40 *Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him.*
⁴¹ *Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet*

and begged him to come to his house, ⁴²for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying. As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. We begin a story within a story. It is about physical healing pointing toward something greater. Jairus, the leader of a synagogue, comes to Jesus on behalf of his daughter. We would tend to group him among those hostile to Jesus, but he comes in humility and kneels before Jesus. He comes out of his love for his dying daughter grasping for hope. Jesus begins to come with Jairus, meaning He is not only accessible to him as to all the crowds, but also available personally, to turn in his direction.

43 *Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her.* In the middle of this comes another person in need; a woman who is unclean because she has been bleeding, hemorrhaging for 12 years. She was unclean and unable to participate in any public life or worship for that many years. We are reminded of the laws of uncleanness found in Leviticus 15. Anything she touches would be made unclean as well, which would make the crowds around her especially angry. They would have to share in that ceremonial uncleanness for a week and go through another ritual. Many commentators note the difference from Mark. Luke is identified as a physician, a healer. He acknowledges that this woman has spent everything she had without improvement, but leaves out Mark's statement that, "not only did they not help her but made her worse."

44 *She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. ⁴⁵Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you."* Jesus' ministry was open, in public, and anyone could approach Jesus for any reason. He was accessible. He was always in the midst of a crowd and all kinds of people continued to come up to Him. I listed the levels of misery of the demoniac. This woman comes with a similar list. Jesus' reaction brings more questions about what it means for Jesus to be both true God and true man.

46 *But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me." ⁴⁷When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed.* In Chapter 5, verses 12-16, we had the leper who broke the rules for uncleanness in coming near, but not touching Jesus. This woman goes all the way, determining ahead of time that she will touch His garment with a superstitious thought that to touch His garment would bring her healing. Jesus is not only accessible, but also touchable, and given her situation that is not a minor thing. When Jesus says, "*Who touched my clothes?*" His words are not for the disciples. He is looking around and waiting for the person to respond and she does. She knows she has received what she hoped for and falls down before Jesus to confess everything. In her humility and openness before Jesus He has compassion on her.

48 *He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."* The physical ailment is gone, but Jesus' words beginning with calling her 'daughter,' speak of more than the physical issue. He points beyond the physical to the spiritual including the forgiveness and reconciliation that come through faith. The story can now move back from this woman relieved from 12 years of torment, to the 12-year old girl.

Year 2: Week 2 – Chapter 8 Jairus’ Daughter

V49 *While he was still speaking, someone came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the teacher any longer.”*⁵⁰ *When Jesus heard this, he replied, “Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved.”* In the midst of the conversation with the woman, news comes to Jairus that his daughter is dead. They imply that Jesus lacks the ability to help. He refutes that charge and continues to the house. His words are directed to Jairus, to believe what God declares to be possible and not simply the things circumstances seem to allow. The word translated ‘saved’ means literally, safe as in delivered from a direct threat.

V51 *When he came to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with him, except Peter, John, and James, and the child’s father and mother.* This is the first special occasion for the inner circle of disciples.

V52 *They were all weeping and wailing for her; but he said, “Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping.”*⁵³ *And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.* According to a Rabbinic teaching around this time, “Even the poorest person in Israel should hire at least two flute players and one wailing woman.” Jesus tells them to stop, that their work does not fit the occasion because the girl is only ‘sleeping.’ Jesus uses this same image in John 11:11 when he tells the disciples, “*Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep.*” The mourners, who know a dead body when they see it, laugh in scorn.

V54 *But he took her by the hand and called out, “Child, get up!”*⁵⁵ *Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then he directed them to give her something to eat.*⁵⁶ *Her parents were astounded; but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened.* In the face of the ridicule Jesus acts in the authority of his words and actions. Jesus went to the girl and taking her by the hand says, “*Child, get up!*” Her spirit returned and she got up at once. As with the previous stories, we have the issue of touching because no one outside a very close family member would touch a dead body. According to the Torah to do so makes a person ceremonially unclean. That does not bother Jesus, because this touch reverses the normal path of transmission. Rather than the dead body making Jesus unclean, Jesus’ words and his touch bring healing and restoration to the life of this young girl.

In the two parts of the story we find three things in Jesus’ life and ministry. He is accessible, available and touchable. Jesus touches both this woman and the young girl, both of whom represent ritual impurity. He touches the impure and corruption and with His touch brings healing and wholeness. We can also note what brings people to Jesus beginning with a great need, death or illness, the struggles of life that are hard for us to comprehend in all the conveniences of our modern life. The people coming to Jesus in these stories have no where else to turn and out of their need they come to him. The second thing that brings them is faith, believing that Jesus actually possesses the power and authority to accomplish the resolution of their need. I have mentioned the design of Mark’s gospel, and the way in which everything in the first half of the gospel leads us to the 2 questions at the end of chapter 8. Scholars distinguish four types of miracles that demonstrate Jesus’ power. Here in just over one chapter we have seen all four types in a row.

Chapter 9 The Mission of the Twelve

V1 *Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. Jesus' itinerant ministry provided ample opportunity for demonstrating His divine power and compassion. The disciples are accompanying Him along the way and observing all that He is doing. With these verses the focus shifts to give attention to Jesus' relationship with His disciples and the means by which He is teaching them to understand His person and work. This will take some time as they do not catch on quickly and we recognize that it will only be after the resurrection and Pentecost that their eyes are really opened. He tells them to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of heaven and to heal with the authority to do what is asked.*

V3 *He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. ⁴ Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. ⁵ Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." ⁶ They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.* When we look at the disciples, we find a four-step process. First is conversion; coming to faith. Then comes training, catechesis in coming to the knowledge of God. Third is to be commissioned and given this authority, the moment illustrated in this lesson. Last comes Pentecost, the sending out into the world equipped and prepared to face a hostile world. An alternate view uses 4 D's, the progression from Drama, to Doctrine, Doxology and Discipleship.

As we listen to Jesus sending out the disciples, we must know that God sends us out to do the same. We are all blessed in order to be a blessing to other people. God is calling us to trust in Him. It is not about my ability, but simply the willingness to be obedient.

V7 *Now Herod the ruler heard about all that had taken place, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, ⁸ by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the ancient prophets had arisen. ⁹ Herod said, "John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?" And he tried to see him.* In Luke this is the only mention of Herod executing John. He places the words in Herod's mouth, responding to the questions about Jesus' identity. This story interrupts the flow of Jesus' ministry just as it does in Mark. It gives context to His travels and ministry around the Sea of Galilee. It provides an opening into discussion on the relationship between church and state. The Bible says, '*all powers and principalities will be put under His feet.*' It also says it is given by God for our benefit. Herod presents another reaction to Jesus and the impact of His ministry. Think of Herod in the context of the Parable of the Sower.

V10 *On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. ¹¹ When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.* The map shows Bethsaida at the northeast corner of Galilee. It is at the foot of the Golan Heights, along the water. The crowds were paying attention and followed Jesus. Luke tells us that Jesus welcomed them, preached to them about the Kingdom of God and continued His ongoing healing ministry.

Year 2: Week 3 – Chapter 9 Feeding the 5000

V12 *The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.”* After the brief interlude that tells us of the death of John the Baptist, the text returns to the story of Jesus sending out the 70. As they returned from their mission, Jesus and the disciples attempted to retreat to Bethsaida, but the crowds followed and Jesus continued to preach to them. Evening is now setting in and they are in this remote place where Jesus was looking for some time alone with the disciples. Their concern is likely wonderment as well. How long will Jesus keep going? Basic needs would seem to necessitate some conclusion that sends them off.

V13 *But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.”¹⁴ For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.”* The disciples react with bewilderment at Jesus’ suggestion. How are we to do that? We call this the feeding of the 5000 but if it is just the men we might think the overall crowd could be 2 to 3 times as large. It is the only miracle recorded by all four of the gospel writers, and it comes at a point of climax in the life and ministry of Jesus. The disciples come to Jesus concerned about the time, the number of people and the logistics of this many people needing food. When they highlight scarcity, Jesus tells them it is enough.

V15 *They did so and made them all sit down.¹⁶ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.¹⁷ And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.* Jesus did not make bread to prove His identity, but He does it to meet the genuine need of others. There is a long discussion of Jesus’ identity and the OT signs of God in John 6. Following the miracle, the crowd remembers the bread from heaven that God provided in the wilderness for 40 years. Much of that discussion will focus different ways of seeing things. The crowds ask Jesus for another sign even though Jesus has just fed them in this miraculous way. Jesus tells them the sign they point to in the OT does not highlight God’s favor, but rather the disobedience of the chosen children of Israel. They ate the manna for 40 years because they rebelled against God. They ate it and it sustained them for a time, but that whole generation died in the wilderness because of their lack of faith and refusal to follow where God was leading them. There are many connections between this story and our understanding of God’s provision in the Lord’s Supper. When we take communion, we eat just a morsel of food and a sip of wine. How can so little do so much? Throughout the Bible we hear the message, “Is anything too difficult for God?” We must learn to trust the power of God to provide what seems to us as impossible. God is Sovereign and will accomplish His purpose. We are like the disciples. We have seemingly little to offer, but when God is in control, sharing Christ will bring amazing results. We do not know how and what God is accomplishing through us. We do know that He has promised that His Word will not return empty but will produce fruit for the kingdom.

V18 *Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"* ¹⁹ *They answered, "John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen."* ²⁰ *He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God."* This is a pivotal story in the Gospels. Here it is not at the center of the Gospel as in Mark, but it leads to the same transition. There is no context in terms of the events that lead to this moment. In chapters 8 and 9 we have had significant lead up to this question. Chapter 8 had the four types of miracles. Verse 7-9 of this chapter had the question among Herod's inner circle. This question today will still elicit a variety of responses, though different than those in the text. The second question makes it personal. We know Peter's great confession, but looming over this is whether we share in that confession. This account is brief and following the confession the only statement before moving to the passion prediction is a stern warning to not tell anyone this truth.

V21 *He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone,* ²² *saying, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."* Jesus' call to silence on the question is at the heart of the Messianic secret. Elsewhere, the passion prediction is followed by the disciple's clear lack of comprehension. Here there is nothing but the prediction before moving on to the cost of discipleship.

V23 *Then he said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."* Luke does not have the confrontation with Peter. Without the interruption, these words simple build on the passion prediction. It is a message that is centered on preparing the disciples for His death on the cross. But the disciples cannot comprehend what he is saying. It does not make sense, far removed from their understanding of what the OT said about the Messiah. The reality of the cross makes it difficult for many who claim to be Christian to talk about, and comprehend Jesus' work on the cross. Cicero described the cross as an obscenity and said not only the punishment, but even the word should be expunged from the language. The cross has always been an offense, and yet it is the primary symbol of Christianity. Paul said, *"We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles."* It led him more than once to say, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel."*

V24 *For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.* ²⁵ *What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?* Faith and trust in God require humble acceptance of God's sovereignty. After predicting His own passion, Jesus speaks of the comparable life of those who follow him. It is not about cross bearing for the sake of suffering, but the burden of the daily refusal to conform to the ways of the world. The summons to discipleship is not just for the 12, but for anyone who would come to believe that Jesus is Lord. It is the life of faithful discipleship that is the way of the cross because it will face opposition and require suffering. It is the path of God's purpose for life. The Christian gives up the former life and identity (children of a fallen humanity) to be reborn children of God. It is self-denial in identifying and walking with Jesus even if it does not necessarily result in a death sentence as a witness for Him.

Year 2: Week 4 – Chapter 9 Discipleship, Transfiguration

V26 *Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. Be mindful of the things of God. Our calling is to bring our thoughts into alignment with God. As Paul says in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

V27 *But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”* These words anticipate the transfiguration. There is much debate about the meaning of these words. Scholars have related them to the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, the spread of Christianity, and even the judgment associated with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. The simplest explanation is that some of them, that is Peter, James and John, will see Jesus in all His glory in just a few days on the mountain along with Moses and Elijah.

V28 *Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.* In Luke as in the other gospels, this event is set in relation to the 1st passion prediction, about a week later. The others say six days, but Jesus and the three might have been apart from the others for two or more days, especially if this is the high Mt. Hermon that reaches 9000 feet.

V29 *And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.* Jesus, as a man, presents us with a veiled image of God. While we are all created in the image and likeness of God, He is still holy and set apart from us by His eternal majesty and glory. Here is a display of the difference between Jesus’ divinity and our humanity, as He shines like the brightness of the sun. In Exodus 33:20 God tells Moses, “*Man shall not see me and live.*” Even the brief glimpse of God’s back as He passed left an indelible mark on Moses so that when he came down from the mountain he had to veil his face when meeting with the leaders of Israel. Hebrews 1:3 says Jesus is the reflection of God’s glory, the exact imprint of God’s very being. In this moment the true glory of God peaks out from behind the veil.

V30 *Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.* ³¹ *They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.* The identity of the two men with Jesus is very telling of the purpose of this moment. It gives these disciples a vivid moment of realization that all of the OT, that is all of the Law and the Prophets as represented by Moses and Elijah, point to the person and work of Jesus.

V32 *Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.* This is reminiscent of Abraham falling asleep in Genesis 15:17 when the smoking fire pot and flaming torch passed between the pieces. Abraham witnessed God’s action even as he should have been a participant in such a covenant ceremony. Now the disciples are present, but not active participants. They are witnesses of God and His glory made know in Jesus.

V33 *Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what*

he said. Luke puts it bluntly, “not knowing what he was saying.” This is not the first time. God’s work and action on our behalf is not dependent on our understanding or effort. The impulsive response is quickly overshadowed by God’s further revelation.

V34 *While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.* ³⁵ *Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”* At Jesus’ baptism we have a revelation of the triune nature of God. Jesus is present in the flesh while the cloud and voice distinct from Jesus are seen and heard at the same moment. In Luke 3:22 the words were, “*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*” It is especially noteworthy that those words came just before Jesus was driven out into the wilderness for 40 days where He faced the temptation. Here the words come at this high point, the top of a mountain, from which everything will be downhill until the cross. Jesus knows what awaits Him in Jerusalem, but He is able to begin that journey with another word of affirmation from His Father. These words affirm Jesus, but are directed at the disciples and we might say to all of us as a reminder to listen to Him. We give weight and meaning to His words because we know who He is, eternal God and the author and creator of all things. It is a reminder that Jesus is on a journey that is the work of God. Don’t get in the way or try to impose your own will. Stop and listen to your teacher!

V36 *When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.* In a moment it is all over. The cloud and the voice are gone. Moses and Elijah are gone. There are just the 4 of them again, and they head off back down the mountain. They are silent for the moment, a reminder of the Messianic Secret. The impact of this event is reflected in the writings of both Peter and John. In his gospel, John says in 1:14, “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*” In 2 Peter 1:16 we read, “*For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*”

V37 *On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him.* As mentioned earlier, it is the next day before they rejoin the other disciples, even as the trip down is much easier and quicker than the trek up.

V38 *Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child.”* ³⁹ *Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him.* ⁴⁰ *I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.* ⁴¹ *Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.”* ⁴² *While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.* ⁴³ *And all were astounded at the greatness of God.”* Jesus returns to be faces with another demon and the seeming failure of the disciples left on their own. Jesus relates the whole event to the lack of faith. His statement reads as a moment of exasperation when He adds the thought, “*How much longer must I be with you and bear with you?*” How heavy is the burden of sin that Jesus carries to the cross?

Year 2: Week 5 – Chapter 9 Passion Prediction; To Jerusalem

V43b *While everyone was amazed at all that he was doing, he said to his disciples, ⁴⁴“Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.” ⁴⁵But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was concealed from them, so that they could not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.* We split verse 43. It transitions from the healing of the demon-possessed boy to the 2nd passion prediction. Luke says the meaning of Jesus’ words was concealed from the disciples (Not in the other gospels).

V46 *An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest.* Luke did not include Peter’s objection to the passion after the first prediction. He does include the disciples’ argument after the 2nd that further indicates their total lack of comprehension.

V47 *But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, ⁴⁸and said to them, “Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest.”* Jesus draws the stark contrast between their self-centered thoughts and the humble nature of His ministry. The example of a child is often lost on our generation that seems to greatly value youth. In Jesus’ time many gave little attention to the young, not investing time in them until they were nearing adulthood since so many died young. Many teachers would not waste time for instruction until they were at least 12 years old.

V49 *John answered, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.” ⁵⁰But Jesus said to him, “Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you.”* Anyone who brings glory to God should not be hindered. When the word is preached, when people come to faith, we must rejoice in everything that God is doing. He is at work far beyond our sight or awareness. It is not my mission. It is God’s mission.

V51 *When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.* This is the pivotal moment in this Gospel. It begins the travel narrative that will continue through 18:14. Where the previous verses have paralleled Mark’s account quite closely, here it begins to correspond more to Matthew’s account. Up to this point, the story has been about the coming of the Messiah. Now it turns to His going to His humiliation, to the cross and His death. It is a time of training the disciples, as Jesus is moving toward Jerusalem. They could make the journey in a few days, but Jesus takes His time in this ongoing ministry to equip these disciples to become the first apostles.

V52 *And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; ⁵³but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” ⁵⁵But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶Then they went on to another village.* In verse 49 the disciples want Jesus to make someone stop casting out demons in His name. They were offended by someone else talking attention away from their own work rather than think about how the work of others helped to extend the kingdom. Now they come to this Samaritan village and when they do not want to receive Jesus and His party, they react in a spirit in vengeance. Jesus’

ministry from the beginning is rooted in His spirit of compassion and mercy. It is not a matter of giving it to those who deserve it. It is mercy because it is given to those who do not deserve. There are two textual variants at this point in the story with much debate among scholars about its omission from the text. It is left out because the oldest manuscripts do not include it. The addition contains an explicit reference to Elijah when the disciples speak of raining down fire. Jesus' rebuke of the disciples is then given actual content. He says, *"You do not know what spirit you are of, for the Son of Man has not come to destroy the lives of human beings but to save them"* (Consider the story of Elijah in 2King 1).

V57 *As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."* ⁵⁸ *And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."* ⁵⁹ *To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."* ⁶⁰ *But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."* ⁶¹ *Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home."* ⁶² *Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."* These verses show an interest in Jesus and His ministry, not only in the crowds that came along, but with those who had a desire to be a part of the ministry; to follow Jesus. It gives a brief look at three different responses to the call. We remember early in His ministry when Jesus said to the fishermen, "Follow me," or to Matthew the tax collector, those who immediately left what they were doing. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote *"The Cost of Discipleship."* He describes what Jesus has said to this man, and the next one He encounters as well. It makes a distinction between cheap grace and costly grace. Our first impression of the word grace is that it is about something we can get for nothing, it is free! But every decision and choice we make has a cost, if nothing else in what we step away from when we go down one path and not another. Bonhoeffer's words contrast cheap grace vs. costly grace. He writes, *"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without the requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."* *"Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of which a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ... Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it cost a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son, and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the incarnation of God."*

Jesus quotes an old proverb. *"No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."* This man may remember the story of Elijah calling Elisha we find in 1 Kings 19 verse 20 and following. The call of Jesus is more demanding than that of a prophet. It means full commitment or you are not fit to enter the kingdom. This is not about works of Christian service. He is talking about salvation. We can't get salvation with strings attached or placing conditions upon God. It is complete surrender to God.

Year 2: Week 6 – Chapter 10 Mission of the 72

V1 *After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. (70 is the traditional reading, kept in NRSV. Oldest sources support longer reading, ie. 72) Chapter 9 started with Jesus sending out the 12. Chapter 9 ended with three potential disciples that may have departed after Jesus warned them about the difficulty of the task. Now in the travel narrative there are 72 sent. The results are reported beginning in v17. No specific places given, but the assumption is Galilean towns.*

V2 *He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Ask; pray for the work, especially for more than 72 to join in the effort. The image is a field ripe for harvesting. Jesus gives urgency to the mission and work. There is much to be done but how many are up to the task, or willing to participate. One can feel alone with a seemingly impossible task, another reason for Jesus to send them out two by two.*

V3 *Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. There are constant dangers. Do not be naïve. They are being sent out like heralds, John the Baptist’s role, and we know his fate. Every Christian has been given the authority to proclaim the good news. Jesus’ sending implies competence.*

V4 *Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. This is a short-term ministry, so the instructions are not expected to be general. It is a call to trust in Jesus’ words that God will provide for their needs.*

The wonder of the gospel is that when it is preached, we have God’s promise that the Holy Spirit will be at work in the hearts of those who hear it. God has promised that His word will not return empty; that when the word is preached, the Holy Spirit is at work in the hearts of people who are dead in sin and that word does bear fruit. People are changed and given life and raised up as new fruit in the Kingdom of God.

V5 *Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.⁷ Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Where people are willing to hear, we speak of God. This is far more than a general greeting like ‘have a nice day’ or ‘good morning’. We bring the greetings of the Prince of Peace. We come as messengers of true peace, the peace that comes to those in the Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. Do go looking for something better. Be content with what God has provided.*

V8 *Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you;⁹ cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ They bring the news that the Kingdom of God has come near. They are to do it with compassion, curing the sick who are there. The ministry is about faithfulness to God and His provision, so when they do welcome, eat what is set before you. If this was a gentile territory, that might be problematic to many of His Jewish disciples.*

V10 *But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say,¹¹ ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against*

you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’¹² I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town. We are called to proclaim the message of the Kingdom today. When visiting and talking about God we tell them the story with compassion, recognizing how much troubled souls need this Word that brings freedom from sin and guilt and all the consequences of living in bondage to sin. There are those who do not want to hear of Jesus. What can we do? Jesus tells the disciples to leave a parting message. “*Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you.*” It is a final witness against them because such hostility to God and His Word brings judgment. It is not a sign of my hostility, but a witness against them and can be done with great sorrow. In Matthew 7:6 Jesus says, “*Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you.*” He faced great rejection during His ministry. We think of Jesus looking over Jerusalem with words of lament about the destruction they would face. God grieves over the lost and the rebellion of the world. We must learn to come to this world with that same attitude, to come with the heart of God.

V13 “*Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.* ¹⁴ *But at the judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you.* ¹⁵ *And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades.*

¹⁶ “*Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.*” This is a harsh rebuke and words of judgment and condemnation. As we hear Jesus’ words, consider the targets. Jesus had made Capernaum His home and the center of His ministry. Chorazin was just a few miles away from there. In John 1:44 we read that Bethsaida was the hometown of Philip, Andrew, and Peter. While they now lived and fished out of Capernaum, Bethsaida was where they grew up. While these places had not shown the outward hostility toward Jesus that we saw in Nazareth, they did not receive the message or repent. They had in essence front row seats for much of Jesus’ ministry to see and hear His miracles and teaching, yet it made no impression on them. In Romans, after Paul begins to talk about the means of salvation, he then addressed the question about the Jews. If is it by faith, what benefit is there to being a Jew? Paul responds, “Much in every way.” He points out that to them belong the law and the prophets. They lived and experienced the work of God in their midst from one generation to another. God chose them to receive the message first, to in effect have the front row seats so that they had the opportunity to see and hear everything God was doing first hand. But now that advantage works to their disadvantage because they have rejected Jesus as Lord. Tyre and Sidon represented Israel’s enemies of old. Tyre in particular had suffered incredibly under Alexander the Great. Jesus suggests that if they had experienced the miracles and heard His teaching they would have repented. But now, Chorazin and Bethsaida had witnessed Jesus and responded with indifference and hostility. They would face even worse punishment, suffering and wrath. Jesus began this by calling to mind Sodom, the OT epitome of an evil city. We cannot look at ourselves as better than Sodom. We are sinners in need of the same forgiveness. When we do not acknowledge the truth, “woe is me” because we are no better off than any of these.

Year 2: Week 7 – Chapter 10 Mission of the 72

v17 *The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!"* ¹⁸ *He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.*

This reminds us of the cosmic battle between good and evil, between God and Satan ongoing since The Fall in the Garden of Eden. We remember part of the curse of the serpent included the words, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."* This is often called the first gospel, the first word of promise from God related to our redemption; that a seed of the woman would crush the head of evil and be wounded in the effort. They experience joy in power, but Jesus pushes them to look at more important things. (Rev 12)

v19 *See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you.* ²⁰ *Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."* Snake handlers have used this passage about snakes and scorpions as a sign of God's power. It is more likely a direct reference to Satan, as in the serpent in the Garden. He is the one to be trampled, his head wounded by the seed of the woman. In Jesus' name Satan has much to fear. Jesus softens their enthusiasm. It is easy to get caught up in the thrill of victory, in witnessing a demonstration of God's power and glory. We are called to be God's foot soldiers in the world, but it is not our power or authority or ability that grows the kingdom. It is all the work of God in and through us.

v21 *At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.* ²² *All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."* Jesus' words, "At that same hour," suggest this comes immediately after Jesus has pronounced the woes and judgment against these towns. In His prayer, Jesus highlights the things that are hidden from the wise and intelligent. Years ago a study suggested the higher a person's level of education the more likely they are to disdain religion of any kind. Paul makes this point in 1Corinthians 1:18-25. It is related to the biblical idea that the better off we are the easier it is for us to forget about God, and feel like we can take care of ourselves. We turn to God when we recognize our weakness.

v23 *Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!"* ²⁴ *For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."* They were blessed to see Jesus in the flesh, the work of God among them. We remember Simeon's expression of peace in Luke 2:29-32 when he held the baby Jesus in the temple. They are blessed, but also more accountable (v13). At John 8:56 Jesus says, *"Your Father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."* We might understand that better if it was Moses or Elijah; they appeared with Jesus at the transfiguration. The judgment on Israel in the OT is emphasized in Hebrews 3:16 because those who witnessed the Exodus refused to believe even with all the evidence of God's power and might on full display before their eyes.

V25 *Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* ²⁶ *He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"* ²⁷ *He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."* ²⁸ *And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."* There is a very similar story in Matthew and Mark, but it is during Holy Week when the religious leaders are testing Jesus and trying to entrap Him into a pretext for arrest. Here the story is set during Jesus' travel south and ends far differently than the other accounts. The others asked about the great commandment. Here the question is about eternal life and Jesus responds by asking about the law. It is the lawyer who gives both the great commandment and its corollary (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18). These two summarize the two tablets of the law, our relationship with God and with man. Most attention in the law is given to actions, commission or omission. The summary adds the concept of love, moving our thoughts from the outward to the inward. Where is our heart or mind in regard to God or our neighbor? It is love that motivates right action only as we learn it from Jesus. *"Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."* He is the pure example of agape love, the self-sacrificing, self-giving love seen on the cross. It is beyond our ability (splendid vices). The starting point is openness to God. The lawyer gave the right answer and Jesus commended him, *"You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."* But that is not the end of it. He has more to ask, looking for the fine details of the law (or loopholes?).

v29 *But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"* The question itself exposes the attitude. He does not express concern over his relationship with God or general concern about the relationships he has in his life. One might have asked a question about what love requires. Instead, and as Luke highlights, the question is motivated by a desire to justify himself by means of limiting the definition of neighbor.

v30 *Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead."* ³¹ *Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.* ³² *So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.* ³³ *But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.* ³⁴ *He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.* ³⁵ *The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."* ³⁶ *Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"* ³⁷ *He said, "The one who showed him mercy."* Jesus said to him, *"Go and do likewise."* Jesus does not respond directly, but tells this familiar Parable known as *"The Good Samaritan."* It is a response to 'self-justification.' This parable is an act of personal evangelism with Jesus addressing this man's particular sin. As with all of Jesus' teaching, it is concerned with salvation. This man did come with the most important question of our existence, that of eternal life. It just that in his study of the law he had not come to comprehend that chasm that exists between God's holiness and human sinfulness. He is confident in his love for God and his neighbors, unless, there is a different definition of neighbor.

Year 2: Week 8 – Chapter 10 The Good Samaritan (cont)

v30-37 (Cont) It is about 20 miles downhill from Jerusalem to Jericho, from about 3000ft to about 1000 ft below sea-level. It was known as a treacherous path with a long history of bandits and robbers. We know the reaction of the Priest and the Levite that set us up for the surprise at the end. There is much speculation about the reasons for their actions. It is the most common response whether from the matter of personal safety to maintaining ritual purity and cleanliness. Whatever the reason they ignore the law (Leviticus 19:34, Exodus 23:4-5). The question, “who is my neighbor?”, has been turned around so that Jesus is now talking about who is neighborly. If you are asking “who is qualified to receive my love?”, you cannot fulfill that commandment. It is not about who qualifies, but about the character of your heart. It is about the depth of God’s love for us. After all this comes the question. “*Which of these three proved to be the neighbor?*” Before everyone there, the lawyer says, “*The one who showed mercy.*” Jesus then tells him to go and do likewise. We hear nothing else from the man and Luke moves on to the next story. Does this man get it yet? Do we get it yet? I will never give all. I do not possess the limitless love of God. I cannot do what is necessary to inherit eternal life. “I can’t do that!” I am dependent on the love and mercy of almighty God and our savior Jesus Christ.

v38 *Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.* This is the only mention of these two in Luke’s gospel, but we know more about them from the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, their brother, in John chapter 11. This story is unique to Luke even as the Lazarus story is unique to John. We presume this is Bethany, just over the Mount of Olives from the Temple in Jerusalem. The introduction of this story is vague in time and place simply introducing us to these two women. Remember 9:51 started the travel narrative.

v39 *She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying.* We do not know the full extent of the hospitality offered on this occasion. Had all of the disciples entered with Jesus, or were they off doing other business? If they were present, we might understand better the amount of preparation necessary for serving that large of a group. Whatever the circumstance, Martha is the hostess, who has made the invitation and is busy with the responsibilities of hospitality for a guest. Her sister Mary, on the other hand, has taken the position of a student or disciple, sitting at the Lord’s feet.

v40 *But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.”* “But Martha,” are the two words that stand out in this scene. She was not sitting down to listen to Jesus. She was busy, working hard trying to fulfill all the responsibilities that came with her position in the house.

v41 *But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴² there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”* Consider John 6:27. Martha is worried about the bread that feeds the body while Mary is devoted to the bread that feeds the soul. Having lost all sense of priority, she commands Jesus, “*Tell her to help me!*” What is it that keeps us from opening the Word and reading the Scriptures? What keeps us from Worship and the special time to

listen to God's Word within the community of faith? Jesus responds to Martha with a tender and sympathetic rebuke. Don't be distracted from the priority.

Chapter 11 – The Lord's Prayer

Most Bible's have multiple notes in these opening verses regarding the variances we find in the oldest manuscripts. Some include more of the words we are familiar with and some do not. There are a few with some words we are not familiar with, including one that says, *"Your Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us."* Many are much closer to the version we have in Matthew chapter 6. It is portion of what we know of as the Lord's Prayer. The name needs to be understood as the model of prayer that Jesus taught. It is not a prayer that Jesus would pray for Himself, as He is not in need of forgiveness. The fullest expression of Jesus' own prayer comes in the high priestly prayer in John 17.

v1 *He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."* ²*He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.* Jesus has referred to our Father in heaven twice previously [2:49; 10:21]. Calling God, Our Father, speaks of the personal relationship we have with God, the intimacy and knowledge of one who is at the same time the creator and ruler of all things. True prayer directs our eyes to our Father from a relationship of our heart. It is about our attitude, not eloquence or proficiency. Martin Luther wrote *"A Simple Way to Pray"* to instruct his barber on how to use the Lord's Prayer as a guide for prayer. One of his key phrases was, *"Let God be God."*

v3 *Give us each day our daily bread.* Saying, "this day" reminds us that we should do this everyday, in recognition of our dependence upon God and His provision for all our needs.

v4 *And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."* God comes to us in an abundance of mercy and grace, and we know that our debt is paid and we are now counted as righteous before God. True forgiveness cleanses our hearts not only of our sin, but the unforgiving spirit of our fallen heart and soul. We are reminded of the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant [10,000 talents]. Paul, in Romans 1:14 understood himself as the chief of sinners. Forgiven, this created a softness of heart and desire to bring forgiveness to others. Forgiveness leads us to desire deliverance from trials and temptation. Again this is a model prayer. We are used to saying it in public, but it is recommended for frequent use in private prayers. Whenever we bring this prayer, it needs to be more than words by rote without meaning, in other words, it is not the repetition of words that gains God's favor. Where is our heart?

v5 *And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.'⁷ And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.'⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.* This changes direction from how we approach God, to how God hears our prayers. Jesus is arguing from the lesser to the greater. This is how we as human beings respond. God is the one who is greater, and responds with far more graciousness.

Year 2: Week 9 – Chapter 11 Prayer

v5 cont The man with a friend who comes in the middle of the night turns to his neighbor for help. It is inconvenient when lying in bed with the doors lock and sound asleep. The immediate response might be wait until morning – go to bed! But persistence pays off when he keeps pounding until a response. It is a normal human response. The Parable of the Persistent Widow makes a similar point in 18:1-8. God who is greater responds with graciousness. He is never resting or in an inconvenient moment. He is always listening and ready to respond. If we can get our neighbor to respond by our persistence, how much more is God always listening and ready for our needs?

v9 *“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. When Jesus tells us to ask, seek, and knock, it is a call for us to come to Him; to come to the Father who provides for us everything that we need. It echoes similar thoughts in the OT (Deut 4:29; Isaiah 55:6, 65:1). In the Lord’s Prayer we ask, “Give us this day our daily bread.” In the catechism, Luther explains this by saying, “God gives daily bread to everyone even without our prayers, but we pray in this petition that God would help us to realize this and to receive it with thanksgiving.” We must caution that it is not a blank check for anything we want (James 4:3; Luke 22:42).*

v11 *Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”* Jesus reinforces the point with a further example. Not only does God respond to us, and to our prayers, He does so in a way that doesn’t simply spoil us by giving us everything we want. He is a loving parent giving us what is best for us. You do not give a stone to a child asking for bread. Your children are not your enemy. You give them what they need to grow and mature. There are no perfect parents. We don’t always get it right. We struggle to give appropriate correction and discipline so they learn the lessons they need. We know we can spoil them and give such that they no longer appreciate blessings. Our Father knows all, knows what we need and He is at work in the world **for us**. If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more does God love and provide for us. It is the Father’s good pleasure to give in abundance.

v14 *Now he was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. ¹⁵ But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.” ¹⁶ Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven. The supernatural character of Jesus’ work is obvious to everyone, such that they do not challenge the power demonstrated, but the source of that power. The charge against Jesus is blasphemy because they are showing contempt toward God.*

v17 *But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house. ¹⁸ If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? —for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹ Now if I*

cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁰ *But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you.* Luke does not identify the opposition in this passage. This question of Jesus' identity is also known as Lewis' Trilemma, the apologetic argument of CS Lewis found in his book, "Mere Christianity." Let me quote a portion of it. "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God" The claim is that Jesus is of Beelzebub, but everything Jesus does demonstrates the character of God. He cares for those in need. He reaches out in love to help those who are fallen and forgives sinners.

v21 *When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe.* ²² *But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder.* ²³ *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.* Jesus repeatedly referred to the Kingdom of God. Those He sent out were told to say, "The Kingdom of Heaven has come near." It is near because the Kingdom exists wherever the King exercises His authority, and Jesus is doing that right before their eyes. He lays out the choice in stark terms. "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." There are many unbelievers who say, "I'm not against Jesus, I just don't believe in Him or feel the need for Him." Jesus says that is not possible. There is no neutrality. Those not actively for Him are truly against Him.

v24 *"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but not finding any, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.'* ²⁵ *When it comes, it finds it swept and put in order.* ²⁶ *Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first."* This is not like the story of Legion and the demons filling the pigs that ran down the hill to destruction in the Sea of Galilee. Jesus cast out the demon, but there is nothing of the status or location of that demon. It is removed but not destroyed. Casting out the demon is not enough. To get rid of a particular evil gives one a new start, but where do you go from there? That space must be filled with something good, or the vice, demon, or unclean spirit may return, and then things become worse.

v27 *While he was saying this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!"* ²⁸ *But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!"* She praises Jesus by lifting up His mother. Jesus responds by bringing the blessing right back to the message He has been giving. The call of the Gospel is for us to come to Christ. When I put my trust in Christ, He takes my sin and gives me His righteousness. The Word calls us to obedience.

Year 2: Week 10 – Chapter 11 Jesus in Conflict

v29 *When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, “This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.³⁰ For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation.*

It was back at verse 16 as Jesus had cast out a demon that we saw three responses. Some were amazed, others accused Him of the demonic, working by means of Beelzebul, and the third group asked for a sign. Those testing Him wanted a sign from heaven but He tells them there is only one sign, the sign of Jonah. Jesus addresses them according to the nature of their request. They are not willing to follow the scriptures or see what is right before them. There is no more important sign than the events of Holy Week, Jesus’ death on the cross and His resurrection. The Bible sets the table for the event throughout the OT, getting everything in place and telling the world ahead of time the exact means He would use to solve the problem of sin. Then He came and did it, and the three days in ‘the heart of the earth,’ like Jonah’s three days, speak of death and resurrection. There is not a more clear statement of God’s power to accomplish His will and purpose.

v31 *The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!³² The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!*

This generation saw God in Jesus clearly demonstrated by His power and authority. The Ninevites were a most evil people, but they repented because of a messenger. Jesus is telling them, “You are eyewitnesses and you refuse to believe your own eyes, because your hearts are so full of evil. He tells these people and religious leaders, you feel so self-righteous, yet those you look down on will condemn you on the Day of Judgment.”

v33 *“No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar, but on the lampstand so that those who enter may see the light.³⁴ Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light; but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness.³⁵ Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness.³⁶ If then your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays.”* The references to the contrast between light and darkness come throughout scripture (Isaiah 44:18; Psalm 19:1; John 3:19ff; Ephesians 5:13-14; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 3:17-18). In John 12:35 we read, “So Jesus said to them, ‘The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.’” The problem in the story is not the lack of light. Jesus’ light is clearly shining in the world. He came and did sign after sign in His teaching, His miracles and the whole tenor of His ministry reaching out to the poor, sinners, blind and oppressed. Those who are now asking about signs, even immediately in the wake of casting out a demon are truly blind. What do they think they just witnessed? This is why Jesus speaks of only one more sign, that of Jonah which relates to His death and resurrection.

v37 *While he was speaking, a Pharisee invited him to dine with him; so he went in and took his place at the table.* ³⁸ *The Pharisee was amazed to see that he did not first wash before dinner.* The last 20 verses have Jesus responding to opposition that seems general from members of the crowd. Now it becomes specific. The Pharisee invites Jesus to dinner. While Jesus' ministry may have intrigued many of them we do not know the motivation for this invitation. Whatever the motive, it quickly turns into conflict. Jesus did not perform the traditional washing of hands. This was not our image of washing with soap and water. This was a ritual purification symbolic in nature to affirm personal cleanliness in case one had been tainted by an encounter with an unclean Jew or any gentile. It was not a part of the OT. It was described in the Mishna, using enough water to fill 1½ egg shells, pouring it over the fingertips and letting it run down the wrist symbolizing bathing and cleansing. It was symbolism, as if one could cover sin by such external actions. Jesus honored and kept the law of God, but when it came to the human traditions and additions to the law, in this case He deliberately breaks the law of man.

v39 *Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.* ⁴⁰ *You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?* ⁴¹ *So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you.* Jesus highlights this scrupulous attention to the outside washing of hands that is just a symbolic ritual and tells them that what really matters is what is on the inside, in their hearts and minds, their thoughts and evil intentions. *"You are full of greed and wickedness."* In Deuteronomy 4:2 we read, *"You shall not add to the word that I command you, not take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you."* The whole basis of this statement is to remind the people where the Law came from. God gave it to the people, and He gave them what they needed. They could not improve on it by acting as editors in either addition or subtraction. For these religious leaders these traditions had become as important, if not even more important than the Law God had given in scripture. Knowing this man's thoughts, and those of the others from the religious community who were at the meal, Jesus addresses their hypocrisy.

v42 *"But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others.* ⁴³ *Woe to you Pharisees! For you love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces.* ⁴⁴ *Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without realizing it."* Jesus gives three "Woe" statements in a row attacking the outward rituals that serve no other purpose but to try and build up their own personal reputation. Matthew 6:1 sums up the problem. Christian piety, practicing righteousness is to be done for God, not for show. They were offended at Jesus and learned nothing. It is the person who loves the truth, the neighbor, the scriptures and Christ our Savior from the heart that brings glory to God. In the first chapter of Luke, the nativity hymns repeat the refrain of turning the world upside down. The Magnificat echoes Hannah's song in the OT of God bringing down the mighty and lifting up the lowly. Psalm 25:9 says, *"He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way."*

Year 2: Week 11 – Chapter 11 Jesus in Conflict

v45 *One of the lawyers answered him, “Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us too.”* There is no break from the previous ‘woes’. This is another invited guest of the Pharisee. This is another manner of referring to the scribes who were the legal experts and the group responsible for developing the religious system. The Pharisees were the ones trying to live according to that system. When Jesus calls out the Pharisees on their religious practices, it is an attack on those who designed the system as well.

v46 *And he said, “Woe also to you lawyers! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them. ⁴⁷ Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your ancestors killed. ⁴⁸ So you are witnesses and approve of the deeds of your ancestors; for they killed them, and you build their tombs.* The implicit criticism of the previous ‘woes’ is made explicit. Jesus goes to the heart of their work. They have devoted their lives to studying the Law and developing rules and regulations related to the Law of God. They take pride in their work, but Jesus tells them they shut the door to heaven and sent people to hell. Jesus next ‘woe’ goes after their attitude towards true prophets. God sent his prophets and apostles even knowing the way the world would reject them. The external action is designed to make them look better than their ancestors. Jesus says their work only affirms that they are just like their fathers. Jesus knows their hearts and is exposing them because even as they present this outward appearance, they are plotting against Jesus to kill him.

v49 *Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,’ ⁵⁰ so that this generation may be charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be charged against this generation.* He gives a sweeping indictment of the history of murder against God’s people from A to Z, Abel to Zechariah. He tells them this generation will be charged with all, and suffer the judgment. It is not hard to connect this with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish holocaust of 70AD.

v52 *Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.”* It is not only that they have rejected the word of God for themselves, but as religious leaders they get in the way of those who have a heart for God and are seeking His truth. I think of this in terms of modern theological scholarship, so much of which has no interest in bringing light to God’s Word or helping people to understand it. So much of it takes the form of skepticism, “Did God really say?”, and promotes doubt and confusion within the church. It is false religion.

53 *When he went outside, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile toward him and to cross-examine him about many things, ⁵⁴ lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.* This is no surprise given the preceding verses. We might only ask why Luke says they now ‘began’ to be very hostile. Until now it has been subtle and hidden. Now their opposition and hostility is on full public display. Jesus leaves the house of the Pharisee and resumes the open-air teaching among the crowds.

Chapter 12 Warnings and Exhortations

v1 *Meanwhile, when the crowd gathered by the thousands, so that they trampled on one another, he began to speak first to his disciples, "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy. ²Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ³Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops.* Luke tells us Jesus said this to the disciples. No doubt they were heard and passed on by these masses. This builds on the hostility of the Pharisees after the 'woes.' We live in a time when phones and cameras provide a record of human activity. People still deny guilt even when video and audio evidence gives great clarity. Jesus' comments tells us that even without our modern technology, at the judgment day, God will make know every human action and nothing will be hidden. More than the video evidence, God will disclose the human heart. (Revelation 20:11-15)

v4 *"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. ⁵But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! ⁶Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. ⁷But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.* Some church leaders preach that there is no hell, or if there is, they are 'not sure anyone is there.' We confess in the creeds that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead. To those who feel comfortable, who live in pride as hypocrites, Jesus' words are a clear warning. He began by saying, *"I tell you, my friends."* This is not a harsh attack, but an effort to give clarity to the truth and reality of our life on earth. He wants them to have a healthy fear of God, a fear born of awe, reverence and humility before His majesty. The whole understanding of Christian faith includes God's final justice and our ultimate hope is not for this life or this earth. God knows everything, every detail of our life to the point of the hairs on our head. There is nothing that escapes His notice and He created human flesh as the crown of His creation. His desire for humanity is good. He is the one who takes our sin and makes it His own, becomes sin for us in order to become the object of God's wrath and justice in our place. It is by this means that He can rightly forgive the sins of all who believe. If you rightly fear God, there is no longer any need to be afraid.

v8 *"And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; ⁹but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.* Having received all good things from God, He sends us out into the world to proclaim what we ourselves have received. We praise God for His goodness before the nations, declaring the wondrous deeds He has done. Jesus recognizes our ongoing struggle with sin. When faced with persecution, we may try to weasel our way out. There are times we may remain silent and act in self-preservation. That is sin against God. Jesus' words foreshadow His passion and crucifixion, and the things the apostles and many followers would experience in the history of the church. As Jesus sends out His followers into the world to bring the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven into all the world, He tells them that the hatred He receives will come also upon any of His followers.

Year 2: Week 12 – Chapter 12 Warnings and Exhortations

v10 *And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.* Jesus recognizes our ongoing struggle with sin. When faced with persecution, we may try to weasel our way out. There are times we may remain silent and act in self-preservation. That is sin against God. The hostility to Jesus has led to more outrageous charges. They began their plans and plots to put Him to death. They moved from charging Him with being possessed by a demon, to equating Him with Satan. When He speaks of the unforgiveable sin it is a direct attack on their charge. They have seen the work of the Holy Spirit through Him, and blasphemed the Holy Spirit by identify the Spirit with Satan instead. God is not mocked. He will put up with so much, but no more.

v11 *When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; ¹²for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say.* This is a call to boldness in talking about Jesus and our obedience to Him. He says, “Do not worry.” This is in addition to His early admonition, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” The promise is that the Holy Spirit is with us. The Spirit will help us, guide us and give us the words we need to respond. We need to be careful not to use this as an excuse for laziness.

v13 *Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” ¹⁴But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?”* We do not know any details of the situation. We do know that in the end Jesus will come again to judge all things. But in terms of earthly possessions, Jesus will say, “*My kingdom is not of this world.*” His purpose is not to achieve economic justice within a family controversy. Within the concept of inheritance is the problem of entitlement.

v15 *And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”* We just finished a section introduced with the words, “*Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees... their hypocrisy.*” Now it is beware, or take care against greed. Jesus speaks more about our relationship with money and possessions than any other topic. It provides the introduction for the parable.

v16 *Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”* Consider what Paul writes in 1Timothy 6:9. We do find a tension in the Bible with regard to wealth. Abraham and the rest of the Patriarchs were very wealthy. For Abraham the wealth was an incidental next to his desire for God’s promise to have a son. Job is another model of a man with wealth who gave primary attention to God. We also have these words from Jesus in John 10:10. “*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*” The rich man in this

story has only one purpose, his own personal enjoyment and satisfaction. He is totally self-centered. He is talking to himself, finding satisfaction in feeling no need to work. His desire is a life of complete pleasure, some form of hedonism. Jesus' parable quickly turns to the uncertainty of our plans and desires. The rich fool relaxes, feeling set for many years when he does not even have another night of life. How foolish it is to make plans and invest our meaning and significance in things that forget God, forget others, and forget our own mortality. Consider Ecclesiastes 2:18 and Matthew 6:20.

v22 *He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. The church, the people of God are to be the most balanced and reasonable people. Eternity is settled for us so that the worst that can happen to us, death itself, is actually the best that can happen to us in passing through the door to eternal life. Stop Worrying! God is our refuge and strength.*

v24 *Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! In Job 38:41 we read, "Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God for help, and wander about for lack of food?" It is a rhetorical question God asks of Job out of the whirlwind. It is God who knows all and provides all.*

v25 *And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? In order to love others, to help them in their needs, we must first care for ourselves. On the other hand, death is not new to us. We have fears when we try to control our life and our death, but our life is in God's hand. You are not in control of your life. God has given us freedom to choose how to act in our circumstances, but there are circumstances that we cannot substantially change.*

v27 *Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. What we do for ourselves can never reach or achieve what God has done for us. Solomon had acquired the riches of the world, the things that impress people, but Jesus says that all of that is nothing compared to how God provides and clothes the lilies of the field.*

v28 *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰ For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. The Bible tells us that we are the crown of his creation. We are of far more value than the birds or the plants. He is telling us how much more God is doing to provide for you and your needs. *Deus Pro Nobis*. God for us! He gave His only Son to die on the cross to save us from our sin. He has prepared a place for us far greater than all the things this world has to offer. Why do you fear and tremble or panic and worry? Your life is in God's hands. Your future is secure. You are on that path that leads from dust to glory. It is a glory far greater than that of Solomon. The goal of our life is living, *Coram Deo*, before the face of God, under the authority of God, to the honor and glory of God.*

Year 2: Week 13 – Chapter 12 You Must Be Ready

v32 *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. This comes as a final word against anxiety, found only in Luke. It expresses God’s desire for those He loves. God acts in His own self-interest, carrying out His own will, that which gives Him pleasure and satisfaction is to give the kingdom to His chosen ones. The words ‘little flock,’ as spoken to the small group of the disciples, comes across as a tender word for those Jesus holds to be most precious. When we think of lesser to greater, for all that God cares for, life in every form, His special attention and gifts are for those He created as the crown of His creation. We know Jesus’ Good Shepherd message in John 10. It speaks of the Good Shepherd in contrast to many others who are not so good, those of this world who are caught up in evil thoughts and desires (John 10:14).*

v33 *Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The things of this world are all temporary and they distract from the far greater kingdom and goal of our life. The person of faith looks to the fulfillment of the Father’s good pleasure. Trusting in God brings a new attitude toward the things of the earth. Sell and give to the poor, give alms. This is the model of the Christian life, living for the sake of others as a means of making purses that do not wear out. Through the history of the church some take this as a new legalism that led many to take a vow of poverty. We must read it in light of all of Jesus’ teaching and remember the interruption (v13) by the man asking Jesus to help him get his inheritance. These words are directed to those who are completely preoccupied with the pursuit of wealth.*

v35 *“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶ be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. ³⁷ Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸ If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. Here are several little vignettes on watchfulness or vigilance. There is a connection between a detachment from possessions and the cares of daily life and an important part of readiness for the coming of the Son of Man. The literal translation would begin, “gird up your loins” a direct reference to Exodus 12:11. Jesus is saying, be ready for the moment of return for it is the day of entry into all the glory of the kingdom. Jesus says ‘blessed are those slaves,’ and the image He describes is of the incredible goodness and gifts they receive from the master. It is the image of the messianic banquet. This idea of the LORD serving is unexpected and powerful. How blessed indeed are those whom the LORD will serve when He returns!*

v39 *“But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.” When we read these calls to be ready, there are always two sides to the picture. At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus said, “fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell.” For those who are not ready, who have*

not responded properly there is only judgment. Most of Jesus' words since then have been on the benefits that accrue to the one who is ready.

v41 *Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for everyone?"* Jesus has been talking primarily to the disciples, telling them to be ready and describing significant rewards or benefits that will come to those who are faithful and alert to the work of God. After a shocking description of the master coming to serve the slaves who are found faithful, an image of the messianic feast, Peter interrupts. We might wonder what he is thinking. Remember that when Jesus washes the disciples feet in the upper room, Peter at first declares that he will never let Jesus wash his feet. After Jesus' rebuke, Peter submits, but we understand his discomfort.

v42 *And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and prudent manager whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time?"* ⁴³ *Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives.* ⁴⁴ *Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions.* Jesus then begins to speak of the faithful and prudent manager. This language is more elevated in describing one in a position of trust and authority. Peter might begin to take this as a special word for the twelve, but that soon vanishes. In the next breath Jesus refers to this manager as the slave.

v45 *But if that slave says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and if he begins to beat the other slaves, men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk,* ⁴⁶ *the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and put him with the unfaithful.* ⁴⁷ *That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating.* ⁴⁸ *But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. 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.* Jesus is telling a story with two characters. One is faithful while the other is unfaithful. Part of this story is for Peter and the disciples, but it is also for the whole crowd. The slave is given authority, and responsibility. The good slave will act faithful and wise, living up to expectations. The Master finds everything in good order because there is no complacency or dereliction of duty. It concludes with a word of reward, which is to be given even more responsibility; being given the chief position in charge of all that belongs to the Master. The evil one abandons responsibility and simply does whatever he wants. Finding honest workers who are diligent in their work and care for and preserve company resources can be difficult. It involves the whole matter of how we act when we think no one is watching. We know the temptation to take advantage of situations and circumstances. This description of malfeasance is wide ranging. Even with the bad behavior, we are perhaps surprised at the harsh or severity of the punishment. The literal meaning of the Greek is to cut in two. Jesus often describes the weeping and gnashing of teeth result of the wrath of God.

Our culture that is inundated by words that speak of the unconditional love of God, the words that come from Jesus seem foreign to that impression. As much as we lift up the love of God as seen in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for us, the Bible does not want us to forget that the one who made us is also a God of justice who punishes sinners. What is our relationship with God? We are slaves, either to sin and destruction, or to God.

Year 2: Week 14 – Chapter 12 The Cause of Division

v49 *“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! Jesus’ words in this lesson announce the truth; the Word of God that declares the reality of the fallen world in which we live. Conversations about truth tend to become toxic whether racial, political, or religious. At holiday time we read stories of avoiding certain conversations in order to keep peace in the family.*

v50 *I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! John had already baptized Jesus. He still faces the ultimate ordeal, into which He must immerse His whole being.*

v51 *Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵²From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” Read Micah 7:5-6. Sin is the overwhelming reality of the world in which we live. We may think we always have a place of refuge, a home where we can retreat from the world and have a respite. Now Jesus blows up any thoughts of finding a place of safety and security. We may want to think of the church as a sanctuary, a place of refuge where one can find peace and comfort in time of need, but we know the battles take place within the church as well. It is important for us to understand the nature of the church. It is the body of Christ, the communion of those who believe. It exists for the sake of sinners and we know that every new member fits that description. Those who have belonged for a while are in the process of sanctification, growing in faith, but as long as we live here on earth we still sin. Our sin is destructive to other people.*

v54 *He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens. ⁵⁵And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. ⁵⁶You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? Jesus has had multiple requests for a sign from heaven. As we hear these words from Jesus, we can imagine that he is looking up at the sky as he reminds them of the general practice of watching the weather. Right before them are all kinds of signs. How can they continue to see these miracles and healings and not acknowledge the power of God?*

v57 *“And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? ⁵⁸Thus, when you go with your accuser before a magistrate, on the way make an effort to settle the case, or you may be dragged before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer throw you in prison. ⁵⁹I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.” The things they have seen in Jesus’ ministry, His teaching and miracles, are clear evidence that the Messiah has come, but they are unwilling to accept that truth. Jesus now extends that thought about signs, talking about things that are clear and evident that many do not want to accept. Jesus came to deal with the problem of sin. He takes a regular situation in life and describes the way people react. When in the wrong, it is a very good practice to get in front of the situation and deal with it, to settle the case before obstinacy creates more ill*

will and the desire to make someone pay. Jesus uses this example pointing at a far greater issue. In our confession of faith we say, *“He will come again to judge the living and the dead.”* When He does come again it will be as the adversary to everyone who has not repented or acknowledged His authority.

Chapter 13 Repent or Perish

v1 *“At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.* Someone in the crowd began to tell Jesus about a particular atrocity that Pilate had committed. The description of the event gives some hint to what happened. A group of Galileans traveled to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices on the altar at the temple. While in the midst of the religious ceremony, something had provoked the Roman soldiers watching over the ceremonies to intervene and come into the temple complex into an area forbidden to gentiles. Their presence would have prompted many Jews to pick up stones or other things in hostility to this incursion. Whatever the actual events, the grim details conveyed include the blood of these Galileans being mixed with the blood of the sacrifices. They were killed right over the altar in the midst of the sacrifice. There is no independent account of this incident but there is plenty of other information about the hostility between Pilate and the Jews during his period of rule in Jerusalem. Pilate was cruel and ruthless in wielding his power over the Jewish population in ways that caused him trouble with the imperial government in Rome. No, they are not worse sinners. They are sinners like every one of us that stand under the wrath of God and His justice.

v4 *Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”* Jesus goes on to describe another calamity. Every human being is under the sentence of death. We have sinned and violated God and His holiness. That He allows us to continue to live from moment to moment after any one of our sins is because of His grace. That grace, and God’s mercy and patience are all designed to lead us to repentance. Read Romans 2:4. God’s patience and mercy can also lead to a hardened heart, with the thought that we got away with it once, so we can do it again. Tragedy surprises us, but it should not. The wrath of God is active in the world. People get angry with God over calamity, and yet we should thank Him for His patience.

v6 *Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ ⁸He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”* There are a number of vineyard stories in the Bible. Read Isaiah 5:1-7. It can be taken as the whole nation of Israel, which would face destruction not so many years following Jesus’ ministry. It can also be read as an appeal to individuals, to consider their own relationship with God and fruitfulness in life. We are all living on borrowed time.

Year 2: Week 15– Chapter 13 Healing and Parables

v10 *Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. ¹¹ And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. A significant amount of Jesus' teaching took place in the synagogues. In Luke's gospel this is the last occasion.*

v12 *When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." ¹³ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. Jesus was teaching when He saw this woman and her plight. He paused from the message to address her need. Jesus does two things. He announces her freedom and laid His hands on her. She stood up straight and began praising God. Her response becomes a part of Jesus' teaching message.*

v14 *But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." His rebuke is aimed at the woman and the larger crowd, but it is also a direct attack on Jesus and His authority.*

v15 *But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? ¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" ¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing. Jesus points out the work they are willing to do on the Sabbath. He reminds them they unbind animals on the Sabbath and He unbound a woman, a daughter of Abraham on the Sabbath. Why excuse some work and not other, and how can there be a complaint about a person and not an animal? This is the work of God!*

v18 *He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? ¹⁹ It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches." Luke connects these two short parables to this incident. They are both parables illustrating some aspect of the kingdom. Each begins with the seeming insignificance of its origins. For the disciples and those listening, the image of the tree large enough for the birds of the air to make nests in its branches presents a stark contrast with what they see in that moment. Jesus has the twelve, and He sent out another 70, but that is still less than a hundred. At the crucifixion the sign over Jesus' head will read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."*

v20 *And again he said, "To what should I compare the kingdom of God? ²¹ It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." The leaven is not yeast itself, but a small piece of the last bread made, like sour dough, that gets mixed with three measures. The commentaries highlight the large amount of dough this would be, at least enough to make bread for one hundred people. The idea is that this little leaven, mixed in, will make an impact on a large mass of dough. The impact of the church in the world is remarkable, and it does so making its mark from what is within each believer. It is not the big institution, but the hidden activity in little communities of faith spread throughout the world. In studying small groups and house churches, the impact of*

conventicles in Norway, to base Christian communities in central and South America, the growth of the Christian Church in the world happens in ways that no one can predict or control. The purpose of parables is both to reveal and at the same time conceal. It is the work of the Holy Spirit within us that helps us to hear, to see, to know and understand all that God is doing in the world.

v22 *Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ²³Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" He said to them, ²⁴"Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.* We live in a time when many think in Universalist terms when it comes to entering heaven. When I have suggested this text implies that most people are going to hell, some react with the first verse of this chapter. "Judge not, lest ye be judged." It is not my desire that people go to hell. I preach this because I cannot escape or dismiss these words of Jesus. We preach this out of a desire that more people would come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and not suffer judgment.

v25 *When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then in reply he will say to you, 'I do not know where you come from.'* ²⁶*Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'* ²⁷*But he will say, 'I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!'* ²⁸*There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out.* ²⁹*Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.* ³⁰*Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."* The scariest part of this lesson comes in the description of those who are knocking on the door. This is not works righteousness. The hardest work is what Jesus did for us on the cross. It is not a call to earn salvation. It is making clear that those on this path will face struggle, opposition, persecution, and even death. If we are following Jesus, we are likely to end up in the same place, at the cross, suffering as He did. Luther spoke of true faith as a "Fides Viva" that is, a living faith. The reformers responded to Rome's rejection of justification by grace through faith by speaking about three essential components of faith: **notitia**, **assensus**, and **fiducia**. There is an object of our faith, that is Jesus Christ, the one who died on the cross for our sins. To believe in Jesus we must know something about Him. This content is the **notitia** of faith that is delivered to us through the Word of God, the story of His wondrous deeds. The second part is **assensus**, or our affirmation that this content is actually true. Jesus really is God incarnate, He actually died on the cross for our sins and rose again. The final part is **fiducia**, that is actually trusting God such that we live as if it true. The living faith, Fides Viva, includes all three of these elements. We know John 3:16. We don't always continue on to where Jesus says, "*Whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*" There are many who are confident they are going to heaven, and yet they do not know God. They cannot know Him because they do not know His Word. I am not the judge, but as one who has been called to proclaim the Word of God, it causes me to wonder, what do people believe?

Year 2: Week 16– Chapter 13 Warning about Herod

v31 *At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”* Most of Jesus’ ministry takes place in Galilean territory under the political control of Herod Antipas. Herod also governed Perea that included the lower Jordan River Valley where John the Baptist taught, and the region east of the Dead Sea. Herod executed John the Baptist and in chapter 9 Luke tells us that when Herod heard of Jesus he believed Him to be the resurrected John the Baptist.

v32 *He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.* The Pharisees coming to Jesus with this warning is a bit suspicious. Do they really care about Jesus’ well being, or are they acting on behalf of Herod and trying to scare Him out of the territory? Jesus’ response suggests He views them as working in collusion as if He expects they will report to Herod. On the other hand, most Pharisees hated Herod, because they viewed him as a false ruler, an Idumean.

v33 *Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’* Jesus’ destiny is in Jerusalem, where not only Herod, but all those who want Him dead will find their satisfaction. This is God’s plan. Any of the powers or principalities of this world will not thwart it. They will all play their part in sin and destruction, but in the end it is all to God’s glory.

v34 *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!* Jesus turns to words of lament. We might think of God’s attitude toward the creation found in Genesis 6:5-6 and David’s tragic lament in 2 Samuel 18:33. Paul also expresses this compassion for his own people in Romans 9:1-5. Jesus is expressing the extent of His identification with His people even knowing the hardhearted character of humanity. Jesus is a Jew, and these are His people and His Holy city. It is God’s chosen people, blessed and loved by God who have rejected and are plotting to kill the one God has promised to send for them. Yet that love remains, as a loving parent grieving out of love even in the midst of rebellion and betrayal.

v35 *See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”* The temple had not been built at God’s request. It was David who wanted to build a house for God, but that desire was turned around with God’s promise of a house for David, a dynasty, and Son whose throne would be eternal. Solomon did build a temple, considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, but it was destroyed in 587bc. About 70 years later it was reconstructed, but the temple of Ezra was described as only a shadow of the glory of Solomon’s temple. King Herod had begun a reconstruction project in 19bc, and the work continued until its completion in 63ad. It was only 7 years later, in 70, that it was destroyed by the Romans when they crushed the Jewish rebellion and destroyed much of Jerusalem. Jesus’ activity within the temple complex highlighted the ways in which that sacrificial system had been corrupted to become a burden on the people to the benefit of the religious leaders. He tells them, “It is your house, because it no longer serves God.”

The more important point is that with Jesus' death on the cross, the once for all sacrifice, there is no longer any need for animal sacrifices. They were designed as a preview of the sacrifice that would actually accomplish forgiveness. There is no reason for it now that the world has witnessed the real thing. We understand that the destruction of the temple serves as a further witness that Jesus' atonement brought it to an end.

Luke Chapter 14 Healing/ Humility and Hospitality/ Parables

v1 *On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.* It is a leading Pharisee who has invited Jesus to dinner after Sabbath worship. Along the way and outside the synagogue they come across a man with dropsy.

v2 *Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy.* ³*And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?"* He first asks the lawyers and Pharisee in the entourage about their opinion of the law. He knows they think healing on the Sabbath is wrong, but He wants to hear them say it. They will not. This enhances the idea that this man is there as a setup to get Jesus to work on the Sabbath. The Pharisees and their theological system were not only concerned about personal righteousness, that is keeping the law for themselves. They were also committed to the idea of helping and encouraging others to keep the law. Jesus asks the question, and yet not one of them answers. They do not want to put any obstacle in the way of Jesus, confirming the evil thoughts they have about Him. They have heard that He does this and now they have the opportunity to see for themselves.

v4 *But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away.* ⁵*Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?"* ⁶*And they could not reply to this.* After giving them time Jesus turns to the man and heals him. Consider his condition because it is relevant to what Jesus will say next. Dropsy was a form of edema, an abnormal accumulation of body fluids in the connective tissues or cavities of the body. It was accompanied by swelling, distention or defective circulation. It is often the sign of something very serious like kidney trouble or heart trouble. Other forms can include severe swelling of the joints, especially the ankles. For the Pharisees, the important point is that it is not seen as an immediate threat, which would mean the likelihood that one would not live to the next day without treatment. Jesus then turned to them and started to talk about the things they would do on the Sabbath. He does not call them hypocrites, but He gives an example that demonstrates they would all do certain work on the Sabbath.

v7 *When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable.* The story continues inside at the table. The story began with the comment from Luke that these Pharisees were watching Jesus closely. As we begin the second scene in this story, Jesus in turn was watching them and noticed the way the guests chose places of honor. This was a significant concern among these leaders. They were concerned with status and sought recognition from others and expected to receive the proper honors out of their pride. In Matthew 23:5 Jesus gives a description of the Pharisees and their way of life.

Year 2: Week 17– Chapter 14 A Call to Humility

v8 *“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; The story began with the Pharisees watching Jesus closely. Jesus in turn was watching them and noticed the way the guests chose places of honor. He does not make a direct attack on them but tells a parable about how they might act when attending a wedding.*

v9 *and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. Luke calls this a parable but it is not one in the normal sense. It is a simple word of warning to those present. It is a word of wisdom about how to act around others in order to avoid the risk of humiliation and increase the possibility of gaining special honor and attention.*

v10 *But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹ For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Jesus’ words are not simply wisdom or a political strategy for winning the highest place. Many parables relate to the kingdom where it is clear that ruthless or conniving men cannot grasp the place of honor. God only gives it to those He chooses. The pursuit of honor and prominence is futile. This is a theme throughout scripture. (Psalm 149:4)*

v12 *He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Jesus now gives some attention to the host. His words question the sincerity of the hospitality. It is not generosity if it is to advance personal goals. They are always acting with an eye on what their return on investment might be. Because the poor cannot repay, God Himself will make the repayment. God will far exceed anything one might imagine as His reward. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection and lived this rigidly structure life under the law with the hopes of that future reward. Jesus tells them it is not about their sacrifice, or efforts to achieve personal glory to find favor with God. It is about justice and mercy. It is about genuine love for the neighbor that looks at them, considers their need and acts toward them in tender mercy.*

v15 *One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” On hearing Jesus’ statement on the resurrection one of the guests, probably a Pharisee, responds. The Pharisees did believe in the resurrection and understood the image of the kingdom feast. It is as if the man offers a toast for all in the room to give their acclamation, ‘Here, Here,’ to the resurrection hope. He is oblivious to the criticism of both guests and the host that Jesus has leveled. It may be an attempt at finding peace and relieving some of the tension in the room.*

v16 *Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. ¹⁷ At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready*

now.’¹⁸ *But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’¹⁹ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’²⁰ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’²¹ So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’²² And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’²³ Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.’²⁴ For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”* Jesus launches into another parable that further condemns those in the room. At the Sabbath meal Jesus tells the story of a great dinner, something that could only be given by someone of great importance and wealth. Even as all those at this meal were pleased to be invited, this host sends out many invitations for people to be ready to come when all things are ready. When the time comes, the servants return to call everyone to come to the event, but suddenly there is a seemingly absurd response. Who would look for an excuse to skip the meal? Great feasts were special occasions, and given the sparse nature of entertainment, such gathering would be greatly anticipated. The importance of such feasts is found in the frequent use of the imagery in describing the nature of the kingdom. (Isaiah 25; Luke 13:29-30; Matthew 22; Revelation 19) The image of those refusing to come is almost laughable. Those listening might have thought this a ridiculous story, especially when it is not just one fool, but nobody responding. The Master sends out his servants so that the house will be filled. The final verse begins, “*For I tell you.*” It is an emphatic statement from Jesus that comes often in Luke. Jesus is saying to everyone at this Sabbath dinner, “None of those who were invited will taste my dinner.” It is not hard to catch the insinuation. The Jews were God’s chosen people. They have the invitation. Jesus comes with the final invitation, but they would not. Paul in Romans describes the Jewish rejection of the Messiah as providing the opening for the gospel to go to the Gentiles. The list of those included is the same as Jesus just used in His admonition to His Pharisee host, ‘the poor, crippled, blind, and lame.’

v25 *Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them,*²⁶ *“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.”²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.* The scene finally changes. Jesus is back among the crowds. The Word of God declares the reality of the fallen world. God’s work of redemption is divisive. People think the church is a sanctuary, a place of refuge where we can retreat from the world. Jesus blows up any thoughts of finding a place of safety and security. We think of the church as a sanctuary, but we know the battles take place within. He tells them discipleship is also about the loss of family. What is your primary allegiance? Matthew 10 gives a softer version of this saying that to follow Christ is to put Him above father or son, above mother or daughter or in-laws. “*Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*” That sounds better than ‘hate.’ It may be helpful to think about the way the word hate is used in other places in the Bible in terms of relationship (Genesis 29; Leah and Rachel). True life comes only when we give up on self-preservation.

Year 2: Week 18– Chapter 14 The Cost of Discipleship

v28 *For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’* We come to two examples of counting the cost. The first regards a person who decides he wants to build a tower. Before starting the project he must estimate the cost and consider his own financing ability. The Pharisees and other religious leaders placed great value in position and honor. One went to great lengths to avoid public shame. A project like building a tower is something many people will see. If not completed, the whole community will know and the shame, scorn and ridicule would be great.

v31 *Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.* The next example is of a king who must count the cost before going to war. The consequences of failure in this situation are far more disastrous. It is not ridicule, but death and destruction. The question regards the resources and determination available to accomplish the goal (Proverbs 24:3-6). What is the purpose of these parables? Is it meant to discourage anyone from even starting?

v34 *“Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”* The essence of the Christian life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. If we no longer do that, if we have lost our saltiness, then we are worthless. God created us for His glory. The penalty for sin, for living apart from God’s purpose is that we return to the dust from which we come to be walked under foot. Are we listening, and seeking understanding? God has given us ears that we may hear His Word and come to know Him. Faith comes by hearing.

Chapter 15 The Lost Chapter

This is one of the most beloved chapters in the Bible. It has three parables, *The Lost Sheep*, *The Lost Coin* and *The Lost Son* or *The Prodigal Son*.

v1 *Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”* The last chapter included a harsh rebuke and criticism of the Pharisees followed by the cost of discipleship. These parables in unity portray a different picture of the kingdom. The Pharisees and scribes are grumbling about Jesus’ actions. They watched with dismay Jesus’ willingness to eat and drink with sinners, the outcasts of society. The Pharisaic code classified those who did not keep the law as, “The People of the Land.” Their regulations said, “When a man is one of the People of the Land, entrust no money to him, take no testimony from him, trust him with no secret, do not appoint him guardian of an orphan, do not make him the custodian of charitable funds, do not accompany him on a

journey.” The strict Jews said, *“There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who is obliterated before God.”* They looked forward not to the saving, but to the destruction of the sinner.

v3 *So he told them this parable: ⁴“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*

These three parables all begin with the dilemma of the need for the lost to be found. They also come with a similar ending of joy and celebration. A Jewish scholar saw here a revolutionary note, that God actively seeks out sinners and brings them home. The Rabbi’s agree that God would welcome the penitent sinner, but it is a new idea that God takes the initiative in seeking out the lost. Consider Ezekiel 34, a picture of God seeking the whole flock who are not lost but scattered. The direct statement in this parable is that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. Jesus is emphasizing that God takes pleasure in His seeking and receiving sinners. When Jesus refers to the righteous, there is reason for us to question that identity. Elsewhere we read, *“No one is righteous, no not one.”* Self-righteousness is the greatest barrier to God. Jesus tells this to the Pharisees and scribes, those who think they are righteous and have no need to repent. The 23rd Psalm gives us the picture of God as ‘The Good Shepherd,’ a word of assurance of the depth of God’s love for us. God called Abraham to be an instrument of His saving purpose in the world. In *The Great Commission*, Jesus charged his followers to *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* The whole joy of heaven is predicated on this saving work, of the lost who are found to join in the celebration.

v8 *“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”* If it was bad to make the religious leaders consider life through the eyes of unclean shepherds, it was even worse to ask them to look at things through the eyes of a woman. The Pharisees in particular fit the modern description of misogynists. They had a prayer including the phrase, “I thank you Lord that I am not a woman.” Jesus sets before them this story of a woman and her effort to recover the lost. He uses the image of her joy shared with others as a picture of heaven. This is about the character of God. The Pharisees who thought in terms of joy in heaven over the destruction of evil sinners, are being taught that it is the very nature of God to take pleasure in finding and rescuing those who are lost. These stories are not about sheep or coins. They are about people. God is calling us to participate in His work of restoring and reclaiming His own. He is telling us the value He places on every human life and His desires that those who are lost be restored. There is no question of God’s sincerity or effort in this regard. His love and commitment are seen in the cross and His willingness to send His own Son to be the sacrifice for sin. The next parable gives this full expression.

Year 2: Week 19– Chapter 15 The Prodigal

Two resources for looking at this parable: *The Prodigal God*, by Timothy Keller;
Choosing My Religion, by R C Sproul.

v11 *Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The first 2 verses of this chapter set the context for this teaching. The Pharisees and scribes were grumbling and complaining because of the tax collectors and sinners gathering around Jesus. Their complaint was, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”*

v12 *The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. The father in this story gave his son what he wanted. He did not disown him and throw him out as some might have done given the insolence of the request. The underlying implication is that the son wishes his father dead.*

v13 *A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. After the few days necessary to sell any property or exchange items into liquid assets, cash to carry, the son is on his way. There is likely significant waste disposing of assets quickly at fire sale prices to get his money and run. We remember that Jesus is telling this story to the Pharisees; a Jewish audience who would assume this is a Jewish family. When the son leaves to a far country, it is not just leaving his own family, but abandoning everything of his identity to live among gentiles. There he squandered his property in dissolute living. The Greek word for dissolute includes the sense of being unrestrained in both spending and morality. He did absolutely anything that came into his mind to do as long as he had the money. While it may have been a very significant amount to begin with, it does not take long for him to go through it all.*

v14 *When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. At that moment two circumstances converge. He runs out of personal resources as the land suffers a severe famine. I am not sure we can comprehend what it is like to live through a severe famine. It is clear we have never suffered anything close to that in our country during my lifetime. There are some vivid descriptions of the Bible, especially in Deuteronomy 28 from verses 52 and following. What is described there happened twice in Israel’s history and there are accounts in other historical records of the kinds of things that have happened during famine in other countries. It is gruesome.*

v15 *So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. In self-imposed utter deprivation this Jewish man attaches himself to one of the citizens of that country. He is trying to get anything he can, but all that results is that he is sent out into the field to feed the pigs. Whatever he expects, it would seem that he is not even paid or fed. There is no one in this place who shows him any mercy. We know the view of pigs among the Jews. He is literally living as a pig trying to get some of the pods the pigs were eating in order to sustain his own life. In the midst of hungry pigs, he would wait until they were done before he could scavenge. Even in these conditions it took some time to finally consider the option of heading home.*

v17 *But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."* It is the realization of the character of his own father that gives him some inkling of hope. He knows the shame and sin he has committed and the rebuke he is likely to receive on returning home. He might become a laughing stock in the community, but finally it is the concern for self-preservation that moves him. Even as a slave in his father's house he would be better off than anything he can manage for himself. Throughout his life at home he had been blessed with every advantage and luxury, with all the benefits of life in his father's house. It was all that he knew. As he grew up he had no appreciation for what life under his father was like, which led to his rebellion.

v20 *So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'* Now he had experienced life on his own terms and it was not good. Wrapped up in his own self-centered hedonism that sought only to eat, drink and be merry he had found a path to destruction. All the things of his father that he despised, the discipline, rules, instruction and training of his father were now visible in a new light. He remembers the situation of the lowliest people in his father's house, the hired hands or day laborers that came with nothing, seeking some work as a means of survival. He recalls his father's generosity, paying not just enough to survive, but giving to his workers more than was necessary. In this foreign land he had found no one willing to provide even the most basic necessities. They were all willing to let him die. Is there anyone else who will deal with him or treat him in any manner that even approaches the goodness of his father?

While indulging in his lust and gluttony, this son had kept thoughts of his father as far away as he could. As he comes to an honest and accurate assessment of his situation, the desperate plight he is in, he reaches the point where true repentance begins. He knows his helplessness, with no resources and impending death and he is overwhelmed by remorse. This is where we really begin to learn the true character of the father. The Son understands that by his actions he has renounced his place in the family and shamed his father. In ancient times a family might have held a funeral for a son who had acted in this way, treating him as dead. Every expectation would be that he is nothing to them anymore. His motivation for returning home is hunger, but it is specifically to his father that he desires to return. The only way he can return home with any hope of help is to come in the most humble and contrite manner, acknowledging full responsibility and guilt for his actions. There can be no excuses, shifting blame or minimizing the offense. When he repents it can also be read, I have sinned up to heaven, meaning his sins were so many and so great as to reach all the way to heaven. He resolves to return home begging for the opportunity to work, to earn his room and board and a humble corner in which to exist. He is not worthy to be a son, or even a slave who has a regular place in the household, but only a hired man, dependent day to day on the whims of the master for the right to work and earn some meager amount to maintain his existence.

Year 2: Week 20– Chapter 15 The Prodigal (cont)

v22 *But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.’²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.* We see the character of the father and the depth of his love for this son. It is completely out of line with the expectations of honor and pride that the Pharisee and scribes listening to this story would expect. They knew complete disgust with the son, along with aversion to the father. From the beginning the father should have slapped the son in the face for his insolent request. Now the father again breaks cultural norms. The shame and guilt of this son should have been met by a minimum of silence where he is not even allowed entry. He should have to sit at the door, suffering the shame. The father’s honor requires the son to face the full disgrace he deserves. Instead the father in his actions is doing everything he can to take the shame of his son upon himself. (Consider Philippians 2) The father’s words and actions have already elevated and restored him to his place in the family. Further he is received as the most honored member of the family, with the robe of honor, and given the family ring representing his place in the household. It is the joy of God because this son of mine who was dead, has come to life. He was lost but now is found.

v25 *“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.* The older son may have stuck around and remained part of the family, but it was not out of love. The son has complied with his father’s governance, giving the appearance of loyalty, but it is far from a relationship of love. The distance is seen in the description of the celebration well underway. This would have taken a considerable amount of time especially given the work of killing the fatted calf and making all the preparations to cook and serve it.

²⁶ *He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.* ²⁷ *He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’* ²⁸ *Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him.* The son is angry and refusing to come in. The father goes out to him even as he went out to the younger son. The father’s approach is not anger or scolding, but rather pleading with him to join the celebration.

v29 *But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.’³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’* The son’s anger and even hatred of his father in this moment come out when he likens his place in the family to that of a slave. This is not the reaction of one sudden outburst but a long simmering discontent.

v31 *Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.’³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”* God is reaching out, longing for his children, the crown of his creation made in his own image to come and join together in all the goodness

and bounty of God. But they will not. This is the problem with the Pharisees and scribes. They are disgusted with Jesus for associating with the unclean and deplorable. They do not understand that there are two kinds of sinners. There are the ones who are overtly evil, doing all kinds of obvious evil. Then there are the religious sinners, the hypocrites who talk a good game and try to present the right outward appearance, but still have the same heart problem. They lack the love of God, just like those other sinner. The Bible reminds us often, *“No one is righteous, no not one.”* Don’t resent God’s grace to others. Appreciate that God’s mercy and grace is offered to every sinner.

Chapter 16 The Dishonest Steward

The Parable of the Prodigal Son was directly told to the Pharisees. Jesus now turns to the disciples and continues with the Parable of the Dishonest Manager. This is far and away the most difficult of Jesus’ teaching to understand. I have worked through this several times during my ministry and on a couple of occasions felt like I was getting there, only to realize the next time some great flaw in my interpretation. Of the nearly 40 parables Jesus tells during his ministry, about 1/3 are directly related to issues of money and possessions. That makes it the number 1 topic of Jesus teaching. So where do we go with this story?

v1 *Then Jesus said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. ² So he summoned him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.’* God created us in order that we might glorify him and enjoy him forever. He has made us stewards, giving us dominion over the earth with the authority to use the resources he has provided, even as we know that everything belong to him. Our life on earth is about doing the small things to honor God in preparation for the glory of the kingdom.

v3 *Then the manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’* Capitalism brings into conversations the pursuit of self-interest or as Marx put it ‘greed’. The steward has a change in focus with the call to accountability. It is still dishonest, but his attention has turned from gathering for himself to helping others. It is still self-centered as in, “what’s in it for me?,” but he acts with the recognition that the wealth he has been managing is now slipping through his hands and will soon be gone.

v5 *So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶ He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ ⁷ Then he asked another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘A hundred containers of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and make it eighty.’* We may look at the steward or manager as the primary character, the one whose dishonesty is highlighted, but those he deals with are at least complicit in his crimes. The absentee landlord who appears to be quite wealthy is foolish in telling the manager he is fired, but gives him two weeks notice to do even more evil before his departure.

Year 2: Week 21– Chapter 16 The Dishonest Steward

v8 *And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.* This verse gets everyone off track. How can the master, presumably God commend the dishonest manager? Jesus then seems to turn this into his first lesson commending shrewdness in contrast to the naïve gullibility of the children of light. The steward has a change in focus with the call to accountability. It is still dishonest, but his attention has turned from gathering for himself to helping others. It is still self-centered as in, “what’s in it for me?,” but he acts with the recognition that the wealth he has been managing is now slipping through his hands and will soon be gone.

v9 *And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.* For all the effort people make in accumulating wealth, we can’t take it with us. We had the story of the Rich Fool, who built bigger barns and felt secure, only to have his life end that night. This goes to our whole attitude toward money and possessions.

v10 *“Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?”* Fulfilling small tasks is the best measure of one’s fitness to do more important things. In the Parable of the Talents, the 2 who were faithful were given more responsibility. Our life on earth is about doing the small things to honor God in preparation for the glory of the kingdom.

v13 *No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”* This returns us to the whole matter of our purpose in life. When Jesus calls us to follow Him, He does so with the words, *“Whoever would be my disciple must take up his cross and follow me.”* It is about renouncing our possessions, family, and even our own lives in order to be fully committed to Christ. It is a matter of what we love. Serving God can never be a part-time or spare time job. True discipleship is giving all of our time, and energy to God. God is the exclusive master. We either belong to Him totally or not at all. You cannot try to serve Him and at the same time try to serve the forces of this world. Live with an eye to the future, to the kingdom that God has promised to those who love Him.

v14 *The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him. ¹⁵ So he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God.* We are in the midst of a long interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees. The whole of chapter 15 was a response to them grumbling and complaining. The three ‘lost’ stories concluded with the Parable of the Prodigal Son that included the attitude of the ‘older brother;’ his anger at his father’s gracious reception of the lost brother. It was clearly an illustration of the Pharisees’ own attitude towards the whole idea of God acting with mercy and grace toward such sinners. Then Jesus turned to the disciples and told the Parable of the Dishonest Manager. As they ridicule, Jesus turns His attention back to them and begins to

talk about what they value the most, which is the law. It is not the law of God, but their own twisted and distorted version of the law that they have constructed to fit their own purposes. (Jeremiah 23:1; Ezekiel 34:9; John 10) In three short statements, he condemns their values and attempts at self-righteousness, attacks their corruption of the law of God, and highlights the man-made precepts they have used to justify divorce. Luke introduced those sayings by noting that the Pharisees were lovers of money.

v16 *“The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force. ¹⁷ But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped.* Jesus declares the goodness of the law of God as well as its permanence. The Law expresses the character of God, which is unchanging. In the OT God speaks frequently of their hardness of heart. Jesus notes this same ongoing problem. These people make themselves out to be close to God but their hearts are far from him. They are not concerned about their relationship with God, but the matters of the world including their status, reputation, and wealth. This ties into Jesus’ words about marriage as well.

v18 *“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.* Matthew 19 provides the most difficult passage on marriage. Paul in 1 Corinthians actually comes across with more exceptions while still stressing the intention of God for marriage to last a lifetime.

v19 *“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.* The Pharisees believed that earthly riches were an indication of God’s favor and blessing. Poverty and physical ailments were a sign of God’s punishment. With that background we can see that the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is a direct attack on their whole theology and even a personal attack on their character.

v22 *The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.* The next scene is the death of each of these two. It does not matter the life circumstance. We are all mortals and every person faces the day of their death. In that moment we continue to see a difference. The rich man dies and is buried. We can expect that he had an appropriate funeral and recognition and a burial with all honors. Lazarus on the other hand, in poverty with no one to care for him would most likely simply have his body disposed of in the city dump. But this is not what Jesus describes in the story. Instead we are told that the angels carried him away to be at the side of Abraham.

v23 *In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.* We then come to the final destination. The main character in this story is the rich man, and we now hear his reaction as he finds himself in Hell, or the name Jesus uses on this occasion, Hades. I continue to hear criticism of anyone in the church who suggests a loving God could actually send sinners to hell. The primary source for our understanding of hell as a place of eternal torment is in the words of our savior Jesus Christ. He came to die for our sins while warning of the wrath of God for sinners.

Year 2: Week 22– Chapter 16

The Rich Man and Lazarus

v24 *He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.'* One of the most important questions for us to understand as Christians is what God saves us from. It is from the wrath of God, that is, the justice of God. It is important that God not compromise His own character. The importance of the cross is that it provides the means for God to save sinners out of His divine mercy and grace, while still maintaining His justice. Sin is punished even as the repentant sinner is saved from the judgment. The rich man calls out for mercy, but he has neglected God's word and rejected God's love while on earth.

v25 *But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.'* ²⁶ *Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.'* Jesus is our best example for how we conduct ourselves with an eye to helping our neighbor to see the path to one or the other of these destinations. In this story, Jesus is describing for the Pharisees their own predicament. They are caught up in their personal values with no regard for God or man. He gives them a picture of their fate, as well as a description of the many and various ways God has called them to repentance through the Law and the prophets. God calls, but many turn their backs and ridicule (Consider Isaiah 55:6-7).

v27 *He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house—'* ²⁸ *for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.'* ²⁹ *Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.'* ³⁰ *He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'* ³¹ *He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'* Denied any hope for relief, he expresses a concern for his brothers. Commentators note that such concern would be expected within the Pharisaic community to the exclusion of anyone else. So this rich man makes the request for a warning that would only be for those closest to him, and not for others. Abraham's response conveys the basic understanding of Christian ministry. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Many movements seek to produce more meaningful and successful tactics of evangelism. There are external factors, but the overriding message of the Bible is that it is the Word of God itself, along with the work of the Holy Spirit within the hearts of those who hear it that produces faith. Abraham affirms this saying, *"They have Moses and the prophets. They should listen to them."* The rich man says, "No!, they need more." In the last words of this parable we can see the prophetic nature of Jesus' words. In John 11 we have the resurrection of Lazarus. By verse 45 this event set in motion more evil plans against both Jesus and Lazarus. They reacted to the real Lazarus by trying to kill him again. In both the OT and NT salvation is about believing God's Word. While in the OT it looked ahead to something God had promised, we now look back at the fulfillment of that promise through Jesus' death on the cross. Remember the Israelites who left Egypt and died not trusting God even as they witnessed His wondrous deeds.

Chapter 17 Temptations

v1 *Jesus said to his disciples, "Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come!"² It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble.* Attention turns to the disciples, without the onlookers, we have some give and take between them as Jesus teaches. It is a section with several brief instructions. This lesson starts with a passage that has been a constant warning in my ear. It is inevitable. We live in a sinful world and the actions of others around us are always creating reactions. There is consequence for sin and even greater consequence when our sin leads others astray. It is a graphic image that reminds me of the mobster image of getting rid of the body. Why does Luther say, 'fear and love God,' especially in Catechism? Does fear mean a proper respect and reverence for God? It is to recognize His holiness and power and thus a desire within us to act appropriately toward God. While true, I would also say that when Luther used fear, he actually meant that there are times we should be afraid of God. More importantly, I think the scriptures and Jesus' words make clear that the wrath of God is something every sinner should fear. Consider a parent's discipline. When young, if a child has not come to fear, that is actually be afraid of the consequences of disobedience, they will never learn obedience. The older they get, the more brazen in their disrespect and hostility to correction and discipline. I think Jesus says this because we need to be afraid of the consequences of sin.

v3 *Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive.⁴ And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive."* Jesus calls Christians to give correction when another believer sins. We must not make this our full-time vocation for every offense, but patterns of sin and grievous matters must not be overlooked. Correction should follow the pattern Jesus sets out in Matthew 18. The most important factor is that it is motivate by the desire for reconciliation and restoration. We understand that historically church discipline was often carried out with the desire to destroy enemies. Correction in Christian love always seeks restoration and stands ready to forgive when repentance takes place. Jesus directs us to forgiven the same sin again and again and again. Here Jesus refers to the traditional Jewish understanding of forgiving 7 times (Compare Matthew 18:22). It is not that we are keeping track of multiple offenses looking for the moment to stop forgiving. It is that we always stand ready to forgive. This is the way in which Christ loved us, and forgives our sins.

v5 *The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"⁶ The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.* The disciples respond to limitless forgiveness with, 'Increase our faith!' Yes, we understand the need to forgive, but when it is a constantly repeated sin, isn't there a limit? This is not something they (we) can do on their (our) own. They need help and so their request: Help us Jesus. They still had a fragile faith that was mixed with doubt and uncertainty. It is not about sufficient faith, but real faith. It is a call to obedience, to listen to His Word, and live in a trusting relationship with God.

Year 2: Week 23– Chapter 17

The Rich Man and Lazarus

v7 *“Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table’? ⁸ Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink’? Jesus speaks of the expectations of a slave. This is problematic for many in our time because slavery is understood as one of the worst practices in the history of the world. How can scripture seem to condone it? Our modern view is seriously tainted by the American experience and its ongoing consequences in our day. Historically, within the household, the slave is the one always doing work for the master or Lord. Before the slave can take care of his own needs, he has to do his duty. There is no expectation of reward for doing the work commanded. Obedience to a command is not a cause for boasting and or special rewards because it is nothing more than the regular duty. In the middle ages the church developed a doctrine of works of supererogation, that is, gaining excess merit by doing works above and beyond the call of duty. The Protestants of the reformation took great issue with this. God has commanded us to be perfect and no one has measured up to that standard. God is under no obligation or indebtedness to us. Jesus’ words are a warning to us against taking to much pride in the things that we do accomplish in faith. When we do the right thing with a good result, we face another dangerous temptation. We remember that St Augustine spoke of splendid vices, good works always tainted by some sinful element. Pride and arrogance tempt everyone who has a sense of spiritual progress. It is spiritual pride. When we begin to be useful to God and see the power of God flow through our lives, there is that temptation of our fallen nature that begins to think that God and other people should be impressed. These recent chapters have highlighted the weakness of the Pharisees in this regard. They took great pride in the things that impressed others.*

v9 *Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’” We consider that Jesus’ words direct our self-assessment. It is not designed to build up self-esteem. It is a clear reminder, a declaration of our status before God. He is the one who made us. We belong to Him. We are nothing in and of ourselves. Every breath we take is a gift from Him. There is nothing we can do to sustain or lengthen our lives. There are constant calls for us to be humble both before God and others. Jesus’ ministry was a model of humility. The humble do not imagine that they have served God so well as to impress Him. We are to be humble so as to submit to the Word of God in doctrine and in practice taking care not to lead others into error. We are to be humble so that we always forgive those who sin against us. We are to be humble such that we always recognize our own weakness and dependency upon God. In chapter 12:35-37 we had a different message. There is a reason for the difference. We truly are the slaves of God, belonging to Him as the one who created us. The good news is that God treats us far better than we deserve. He has fashioned and made us, recreated and refined us. We look forward to honor and reward, living in the glory and radiance of the kingdom only because of the depth of His love for us.*

v11 *On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"*

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." We covered much about leprosy in Luke 5. The link with ritual cleanliness is obvious because of the ease of transmission of the disease. In relation to sin it was a reminder of the consequences of sin that affect everyone who comes into contact with it. In this story we have 10 people who were faced with this miserable situation. Jesus' response is further evidence of His compassion, a trait that was constantly on display as Jesus took time to care for and heal everyone who came to Him. It is the story about God's action and the way people respond. The news of Jesus' ministry brought hope to the hopeless. Jesus sends them to the authorities to be declared clean. The Samaritans were separate from the Jewish religious practices, bringing an immediate separation in the group. They will give an account of their encounter with Jesus. The lepers are praising God! All of these men will give direct testimony to the most hardened opponents of Jesus to the truth of His healing power. Many were healed and brought back to life by Him even those who didn't return to thank Him. But the greater gift, the greater miracle in this story is the new life that the Samaritan leper received through faith. He is the one who was truly made well.

v20 *Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; ²¹ nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." As Jesus responds to the Pharisees, remember His words in 9:27. The question relates directly to Jesus' identity. If He is the king, then He must have a plan and timetable for assuming the throne and ushering in His kingdom. Daniel 7 reminds us of all that is given to the Son of Man. He turns from the Pharisees and gives the rest of His response to the disciples.*

v22 *Then he said to the disciples, "The days are coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. ²³ They will say to you, 'Look there!' or 'Look here!' Do not go, do not set off in pursuit. ²⁴ For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day." This leads us to think in terms of an invisible kingdom. In the history of the church there has been much reflection on this concept. St. Augustine wrote about the two kingdoms, talking about the church visible and the church invisible. The church presents a visible representation of the kingdom, but the true kingdom is invisible, because it consists of those who are true believers, known only to God who sees the heart. In faith and in the proclamation of the gospel the kingdom is present. We know and understand that the full realization of the kingdom is something that is still in the future.*

Year 2: Week 24– Chapter 17

The Rich Man and Lazarus

v25 *But first he must endure much suffering and be rejected by this generation.* The preceding verses were speaking of the *Son of Man* as a reminder of the one presented before the *Ancient of Days* in Daniel 7. Now Jesus includes a note contrary to expectations. He, the *Son of Man*, must endure much suffering and be rejected. Jesus is combining the suffering servant image with that of the glorious image from Daniel.

v26 *Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man.* ²⁷ *They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them.* It took 100 years for the construction of the Ark and during that time it served as a vivid witness to the judgment upon sinful humanity that was coming. We can imagine the mockery given for building such a boat far from any significant water. Those who witnessed this warning gave only ridicule to the whole idea. It was not until the moment of destruction that they realized the truth of the warning that was right before them all that time.

v28 *Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building,* ²⁹ *but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed all of them* ³⁰ *—it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.* ³¹ *On that day, anyone on the housetop who has belongings in the house must not come down to take them away; and likewise anyone in the field must not turn back.* Jesus reemphasizes the point by giving this 2nd story, that of Sodom and Gomorrah. There is much going on around this judgment, including the story of Abraham saving Sodom from the northern kings when he rescued Lot. When the word of judgment was shared with Abraham, he interceded and asked God to spare the city for the sake of those righteous ones in the city. In the end, no one of the city was righteous, and only Lot and his family were rescued. The story includes the angels coming to warn Lot and his family. That warning was shared with the men engaged to be married to Lot's daughter. No one took the word seriously. This time Jesus says, *"they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building."* Even Lot and his family hesitated until the angels seized them and brought them out of the city. Despite the warning to not look back, Lot's wife is turned to a pillar of salt.

v32 *Remember Lot's wife.* Several years ago I made an effort to read through the Koran. I was surprised by a phrase that came up numerous times, I think the total is 17 mentions throughout the book. It was this warning: *"Remember Lot's wife,"* with its repeated use. I wondered about its inclusion in the Bible. This is the only place in the Bible we find this specific warning. A similar warning is presented in other forms, in other stories.

v33 *Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it.* ³⁴ *I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left.* ³⁵ *There will be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken and the other left."* There are more than a few stories of two people standing next to each other where one is killed in the disaster and the other does not even have a scratch. From a Christian perspective, like the difference in standing inches apart, the difference in trusting in Jesus or not, brings a far different fate and outcome.

v37 Then they asked him, “Where, Lord?” He said to them, “Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.” These closing verses emphasize urgency. Be ready for the kingdom. Be ready for Jesus, by coming to Him. Come in humility and repentance and there will be no reason to fear the judgment. We look forward to Jesus coming and bringing us into the joy of His glorious kingdom.

Chapter 18 More Parables – The Unjust Judge

v1 Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. In Luke 11:8 while teaching the disciples to pray there is another prayer that emphasizes persistence. The point in both is that of impudent persistence, to the point of shamelessness, that will not cease until the favor or request is granted.

v2 He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ ⁴For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’ ” I remember ‘Operation Greylord’ in Chicago where 6 judges were convicted of taking bribes. In biblical times the Talmud references corrupt judges. A Hebrew phrase for ‘a judge dealing with the law,’ was changed into a different phrase, “a judge who is a robber,” by changing just one letter. Robber judges became an oft used title because they were so corrupt. It was said they would pervert justice for just one meal. The people listening to Jesus’ description understood and knew this kind of judge. Josephus, in “Antiquities” offers a similar description. The widow in the story is needy. The judge finally grants justice because he simply wants to get rid of her and the nuisance.

v6 And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. The success in the widow’s persistence is not about the details of the case, but that persistence produces results even when dealing with someone who is so corrupt.

v7 And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” The key words for understanding this are, “How much more...” What is the character of God? Will not God grant justice? Will He delay long in helping? Jesus finally declares it directly, “He will quickly grant justice to them!” The scriptures give the knowledge of God, that He is acting for His people in many and various ways, providing strength and comfort and protection from our enemies. **Deus Pro Nobis.** We should know this, and yet Jesus concludes with the question of faith. It is a reminder that we are all hard-hearted and stiff necked even when God is continuing to reach out to us in His grace and mercy.

v9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: He follows this up with another parable about prayer. The description of these two men, by the simple note of their position, quickly set in place the assumptions and expectations of the audience to their character. As in the previous parable, the purpose of the parable is spelled out at the start.

Year 2: Week 25– Chapter 18 The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

v10 *“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisees’ identity was distinguished by standing apart from others. Initially it was a brave stance against the idolatrous influence of Hellenization that threatened the existence of Judaism especially under the reign of Epiphanes IV around 200B.C. It eventually became an obnoxious self-righteousness and hostility to others. The tax collectors were among the most despised people in all Israel, viewed as traitors to their own people. In 17:20 Jesus was asked a question by the Pharisees. after responding to them He turned to the disciples (v 22). This indicates Jesus is speaking to the disciples, but the Pharisees are in the background and within earshot.*

v11 *The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ Josephus in his history of the Jewish Wars called the Pharisees, “a class of Jews who consider themselves the godliest of the nation and the most rigorous followers of the law.” This Pharisee is standing by himself. He does not want to be contaminated by sin and especially the sinfulness of the evildoers. It would be as close to the holy place as possible to show his proximity to God. His prayer is a celebration of personal righteousness, a soliloquy of his accomplishments and pride that others can hear. After the negative, he continues with a litany of his own success (consider Matthew 6:1).*

v13 *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.” The tax collector was one of the most despised people in Israel, viewed as a traitor. Most listening to Jesus would share that hatred. The man is by himself in depression and despair. He does not want attention, shame or ridicule. His concern is the status of his relationship with God. The desires that led him down the path he followed have not satisfied and he now has regrets. He is beating his breast and pleading for mercy. His attitude of shame is visible in his downcast demeanor, not even looking up. The dominant religious view is that the good people go to heaven, those who are moral and religious and by this means make themselves acceptable to God. It is the big lie that dominates the world. No one is going to make it to heaven by personal achievement. Since chapter 15, Jesus has described the mercy and grace of God as the open welcome of despicable sinners. Here it is a further affirmation of God as our Father who is waiting and even longing for us to turn to Him in repentance. When the Tax Collector does this the promise of God is fulfilled. Forgiveness of sin is given to the one who repents from the heart.*

v15 *People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. ¹⁶ But Jesus called for them and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁷ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” Jesus responded to the disciples’ stern attitude with anger. He does more (See Mark 10:16). The disciples viewed these children as an intrusion.*

While the prevailing attitude toward children gave them little place or value in society, God shows great concern. Infant mortality provided a significant reason for this attitude. Jesus would invest time and effort into many the world disregarded.

v18 *A certain ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

¹⁹ *Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. Jesus' remark reminds us that only God is good. Paul says in Romans, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Psalm 14:3 reads, "All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one."*

v20 *You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.'* ²¹ *He replied, "I have kept all these since my youth."* He continues with a litany of the second tablet of the 10 Commandments. This man's response shows his complete lack of understanding and comprehension of his problem. He claims to have kept all of them. His words bring to mind Psalm 116:11, *"I said in my alarm, 'all men are liars.'"* Mark's gospel notes Jesus' initial reaction to this claim as positive. *"Jesus, looking at him, loved him."*

v22 *When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."* ²³ *But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich.* Anything that comes between ourselves and God is that which we value most. There two things we must do when we come to Christ. We often talk of repenting of our sins. We also must repent of our self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is not just looking at our good deeds, but relating it to anything we hold onto because we think it gives us value or meaning in life. The heart of sin is self-righteousness; everyone is seeking righteousness. The opposite of righteousness is shame. To seek righteousness means that which makes me right, makes me somebody, gives me meaning. It is the thing that gives me glory in the world, that builds up self-esteem and pride in myself. We build up our self-righteousness and look at others as unworthy of God's love and mercy. If there is something in your life, which to lose it would destroy you, that would cause you to lose all hope, make you feel like nothing, then that is your righteousness, your everything. For this young man, that is what his possessions had become. These were his gods, in place of the Lord his God.

v24 *Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."* The difficulty for those who have many possession or great wealth is the attachment and effort put into acquiring and then keeping them.

v26 *Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ He replied, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."* The disciples were astounded. For many Jews and even into our own time, wealth and riches, abundance on earth are seen as God's reward and blessing upon those who are faithful. When we look at OT characters, the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and many others are seen as enjoying great wealth as a sign of God's blessing. Abraham's salvation, his righteousness was not a product of his hard work. Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.