

## The Seventy are Sent Out

**Lesson Aim:** To see how Jesus brought the Gospel to the world in the Gospel of Luke.

**Lesson Text:** Luke 10:1-24 (RSV)

<sup>10:1</sup> After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' <sup>6</sup> And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you. <sup>7</sup> And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not go from house to house.

<sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup> heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' <sup>10</sup> But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you; nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' <sup>12</sup> I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

<sup>13</sup> "Woe to you, Chora'zin! woe to you, Beth-sa'ida! for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>14</sup> But it shall be more tolerable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. <sup>15</sup> And you, Caper'na-um, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.

<sup>16</sup> "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

<sup>17</sup> The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" <sup>18</sup> And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. <sup>19</sup> Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

<sup>21</sup> In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such

was thy gracious will. <sup>22</sup> All things have been delivered 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 any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

<sup>23</sup> Then turning to the disciples he said privately, “Blessed are the eyes which see what you see! <sup>24</sup> For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

### *Highlights of Previous Quarterlies*

Luke introduced his Gospel with these words: “Many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word. It seemed good to me also, . . . to write an orderly account for you.” (Luke 1:1-3, RSV).

The angel Gabriel informed Mary of God’s plan for her son Jesus. “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33, RSV). In the Garden of Eden, Satan was warned that the seed of the woman would be his enemy, and would bruise his head (Gen. 3:15, RSV). Abraham was promised land, seed, and name. In that name all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3, RSV). We see Jesus as a boy sitting in the Temple among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:46, 52, RSV). Jesus also heard the preaching of John the Baptist, and received baptism from him. He was tempted by Satan, but unlike Adam and Eve he was not drawn away from the will of God. In his genealogy Jesus is identified as son of David, son of Abraham, son of Adam, and son of God (Luke 3:31, 34, 38, RSV). “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all” (Luke 4:14-15, RSV). The section of Luke from 4:14 to 9:50, the Galilean Ministry of Jesus, was studied in a previous quarterly. It began with the call of the twelve disciples, and reached its climax with Peter’s confession of faith in Jesus, soon followed by the transfiguration. At the beginning of this quarterly Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem, the scene of the cross and the resurrection (see Synoptic parallels Mark 9-10, and Matthew 16). In studying the life of Jesus we should also look back to our quarterlies on the Gospel of John.

### *Synoptic Gospel Observations*

In Luke 9 and 10 we move from the mission of the twelve to the mission of the seventy in Galilee and beyond. Herod Antipas, the one who had killed John the Baptist, is alarmed by the great success of Jesus in Galilee. Large crowds gather, and the 5000 are fed. That event is marked by all four Gospels. John 6 identifies it as one of seven signs. At the feeding of the 5000 Luke 9:17 parallels Mark 6:44. But at Peter's confession Luke 9:18-27 is parallel to Mark 8:27-9:1. What happened in Mark's account during this gap? Mark 6:45 to 8:26 includes Jesus walking on the sea, a journey to Tyre and Sidon, four thousand fed, a blind man healed near Bethsaida, several other healings, and debates. Mark and Luke then continue briefly together, but most of the material in this quarterly is found only in Luke, some is shared by Matthew but little is found in Mark. This quarter ends with the arrival of Jesus at Jerusalem, in his triumphal entry which we celebrate on Palm Sunday. All four Gospels cover these events. Just as the Gospel of John adds a lot of material about events in Judea at the beginning of the Gospel narrative, it also adds a lot of material at the end. This included the washing of the disciples' feet, servant leadership, the coming of the comforter, and the fish breakfast by the Sea of Galilee. Luke told his story of Jesus in two volumes, in volume two he tells of the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. By this time we see the disciples at the end of their lives of ministry. Peter, Paul, and John have served well. The gospel has gone out to the nations.

### *An Overview of Luke 10-19*

Jesus and the twelve have concluded their ministry in Galilee, and the region to the north and east. As Jesus sets his face to Jerusalem, it is time to enlarge his ministry team by seventy, and to move out to a much larger mission field. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Luke 10:2). "Who is my neighbor?" The Samaritan knows (Luke 10:29). "Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching" (Luke 10:39). The disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1-13, paralleled in Sermon on the Mount at Matthew 6:5-15). The Yeast of the Pharisees (Luke 11:14-12:3). The Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-34). Will only a few be saved? (Luke 13). Dinner with Jesus (Luke 14). The lost sheep, coin, son (Luke 15). The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16). The Kingdom is within you? You are looking at the Messiah. He will come again. See the larger plan of God. (Luke 17). The Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18). Zaccheus – The Parable of the Talents. (Luke 19:1-17). This brings us to Palm Sunday. The cross is at hand.

*The 70 are sent out. Luke 10:1-17.*

In about 2000 BC Abraham responded to God's call to go on a mission to the promised land. Abraham showed obedient faith. He was one person. Jesus, at about 30 years of age, came to John for baptism, and God said, "This is my son in whom I am well pleased." Jesus left his family, his home, and went fulltime into ministry, with full knowledge that he would lay down his life for the sake of the Gospel. He called twelve to follow him, and to become disciples. Peter's confession appears to be his graduation. He was ready to go out into the workforce. But when Jesus told him about the sacrifices which he and the disciples would face, Peter drew back. The team had increased from one to twelve, but the team was untested by real-life experience. To this twelve were added seventy more.

**Seventy** (v. 1) This is an interesting number. Genesis 10 includes a list of 70 nations that descended from Noah, which populated the world. Genesis 46:26-27 tells us 70 descendants of Jacob went to Egypt. From them a nation of kings and priests developed. Now in the Gospels and Acts we have 70 who will populate the kingdom of God with believers in Jesus Christ. Their message is to go out to all the peoples of the world.

**Harvest** (v. 2) This was the mission of Christ. Jesus is the promised one of Abraham's faith. He is the promised king with the right to rule. The earth is the land, and Jerusalem is the center. Now people are needed to receive the blessings. All the peoples of the earth have an opportunity to bless themselves by coming to Jesus. To make this happen, the word needs to be preached to the world. The Lord needs workers to gather the harvest.

**Pay, Provisions, and Wolves** (v. 3-7). The opportunity of the people in Jerusalem to receive their messiah was running out. Anger and opposition was increasing. The wolves were gathering for the kill. They would kill Jesus, and they would kill several of the disciples. In this emergency situation the disciples were asked to not worry about money, or supplies. The early church in Jerusalem continued on in this state of emergency plan of operation.

**The kingdom of God has come near** (v. 11, RSV). Eventually the church recognized that the mission of the church would continue on for many centuries before the return of Christ, and the fulfillment of the Old Testament kingdom promises of the Age to Come. There was a now and then. Kingdom principles were already at work, but this was only the earnest of what was to come in the future. Nevertheless it is comforting for us to see God at work in our lifetime and ministry.

**The Seventy returned with Joy** (v. 17). One reason why the early church grew so rapidly was that the Christians found joy in serving the Lord. It is easier to bear hardships and sacrifices when they are balanced by

joy (as with the parents of young children). As a Bible teacher of many years I rejoice in the labors and successes of former students. I can only imagine the joy Peter, John, and Paul must have felt at the end of their lives.

**I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven** (15-20). (See also lesson from Luke 11:14-28 on the strong man.). In our lesson text Jesus was instructing the seventy on the terrible judgment reserved for those that reject God's call to repentance. Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden by seeking to gain forbidden knowledge. The king of Babylon (Isaiah 14:12) exalted himself to heaven like the daystar, only to fall in ruin. So likewise was the peril of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. They exalted themselves like the true daystar Jesus. Yet in rejecting Jesus they would surely fall, just as Tyre and Sidon; just as Babylon; and just as Adam and Eve. And Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Satan could not prevail over Jesus in the temptation. Evil spirits were cast out by the word of Jesus. Satan might think he had gained the victory when Jesus died on the Cross. But he is risen. He is exalted to the right hand of God. He is the coming daystar. Following the daystar is the dawn of a new day, the Age to Come. In the New Testament, there is also a positive side to the "daystar" or "shining light". In 2 Peter 1:19, and Revelation 22:16, Jesus is the daystar that will bring light into the world. We should note that the King James Version uses the word Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12 based on the Latin word used by Jerome's *Vulgate* translation. Readers have assumed that Lucifer is equivalent to Satan, or Devil. Actually Lucifer is a Latin word meaning light-bearer; the corresponding Greek word is *phosphorus*. Either can refer to the daystar, or morning star. A little search on the internet will make you aware of current discussion on the word "Lucifer". Luther, Calvin, and a host of modern commentaries do not see the word "Lucifer" in Isaiah 14 as referring to "Devil", but to the king of Babylon. Our text, as used by Luke, does use the Greek word "Satanan" in reference to the final judgment in the Book of Revelation. With the casting out of demons Jesus is claiming victory over Satan (which has the Hebrew idea of "adversary"). Jesus will win.

**Insight and Wisdom** (v. 21-24). God revealed his purposes to the Old Testament prophets. Jesus revealed the purposes of God to his disciples. Through the words of the New Testament, and through the working of the Spirit of God in our lives, God is teaching, and leading us in His ways. In the four Gospels we see many apostles in the beginning of their Christian lives. Jesus worked at building knowledge, experience, skill, and wisdom in the lives of Peter, and Paul. Each of them showed immaturity at times. At the end of the day, thousands had come to Jesus through their ministry. The

reading of Acts helps us to see what grew out of the beginnings found in Luke.

### **Finding your Mission**

1. The song says “There’s a place for every worker in the vineyard of the Lord”. In your life as a Christian, what are some of the “places” God has called you to? This calling to other places could be in many forms.

2. Are there fields of ministry for the harvest of which you have a special interest? Perhaps this is through financial support, through prayer, through short term service, or through long term service?

3. Thinking of the wolves in our text, have you had any experiences where your good intentions met with opposition?

4. What is your testimony of joy? Do you have praise items on moments in which you have experienced joy in the Lord?

# The Parable of the Good Samaritan

**Golden Text:** “And he answered, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’” (Luke 10:27)

**Key Thought:** In this passage of scripture the lawyer is testing Jesus by asking him what the requirements for inheriting eternal life are. Just who is your neighbor and how much does Jesus tell us we are to do for our neighbor?

**Lesson Text:** Luke 10:25-37 (NASB)

<sup>25</sup> And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> And He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?” <sup>27</sup> And he answered, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” <sup>28</sup> And He said to him, “You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE.” <sup>29</sup> But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

<sup>32</sup> Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, <sup>34</sup> and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’

<sup>36</sup> Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ *hands*?” <sup>37</sup> And he said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same.”

## Introduction

He is on my Metro bus only occasionally, a worn man in rumpled clothing with disheveled hair.

[His] life looks different from the rest of ours.

We are mostly middle-income and suburban. His face is etched with exhaustion and he carries virtually no belongings. We drive ourselves to park-and-rides. He appears along a busy road seemingly out of nowhere. He sees our distraction over the day ahead. We sometimes wonder where he slept the night before.

A few weeks ago he boarded the bus, took one of the side-facing front seats and, as he typically does, locked his gaze on the floor. A few stops later a young woman boarded, a regular rider who speaks good but not native English. She swiped her bus pass only to find the machine wouldn't accept it. The driver told her she would have to deposit the \$2.25 fare. "But I just bought this card," she said. "I paid the money."

The driver said she could take the card back to the sales office and explain the problem. Meantime, she would have to pay the fare. The woman became distressed, trying again to explain that she had purchased the pass as she always did and to grasp what was being asked of her. The bus idled along a busy road, always an uncomfortable feeling. The rest of us looked up from our newspapers or conversations and watched with casual disinterest as the two tried to hash out the problem.

Suddenly, in a single motion, the male passenger rose from his seat, dropped a jangle of coins into the fare box and sat back down, his eyes returning to the floor. His act was so unobtrusive that the distressed passenger didn't realize what had happened and continued to plead her case. "You're good," he finally said quietly, holding up a palm to the woman. "He paid for you," the bus driver reiterated and pulled away from the curb.

A hush fell over the bus.

The rest of us had watched the woman's discomfort. He felt it.

We wondered absently how the dilemma would be resolved. He resolved it. We – lawyers, journalists and businesspeople – were headed downtown to help fix the world. He fixed her world.

We could have paid the \$2.25 and never missed it. It's easy to imagine it was his fare home.

Later as I stood beside him waiting to get off at my stop, he raised his gaze and our eyes met for a moment. I tried to say, wordlessly, thank you for reminding me what a fine person looks like. He nodded slightly, held my glance directly and then looked away.

You never know when you'll be in the presence of greatness, or of grace. We human beings are often far different from our wrappings.

To the world, my fellow passenger looked like a man in need of solutions. I admit I often looked at him and saw only what he lacked.

But by the time he stepped off the bus that morning, it was obvious that he was a richer man than the rest of us. He had enough to open his eyes and his heart to a stranger. Enough to give what he had and trust life for the rest.

I have not seen him since that day.

Some people believe angels occasionally drop down to move among us. Others believe we somehow orchestrate the lessons we need to learn.

All I know is that I have new respect for the simple act of kindness. It keeps the bus rolling. It speeds us all on our way.

– Krista Ramsey; *Cincinnati Enquirer*; November 19, 2009

## **Bible Learning**

In Luke 10:25-37 we find one of the most popular parables told by Jesus. A lawyer tried to put Jesus to the test by asking a question. Jesus responds by asking the lawyer what the law says is required. Jesus knows that the lawyer should be able to answer. If anyone should know the fine print we don't normally pay much attention to it should be the lawyer.

In verse 27 the lawyer replies to Jesus with a basic legal answer: "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." Jesus confirmed to the lawyer and all listening that he had answered correctly.

Now the lawyer did not give a complete listing of the law here, working through whole books. He offered a summary, and Christ verified it, telling him: "Yes that is correct, you're right."

If you take a look at Deuteronomy 6:5, that's where we are commanded to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and might. Leviticus 19:18 talks about loving your neighbor as yourself. So those were not first, let us say. But they didn't first come out in the New Testament of course. God had communicated these things for Israel to do, and the lawyer knew that.

I am sure that at this point the lawyer thought he had Jesus right where he wanted him. The lawyer then asks Jesus one of life's biggest questions: "who is my neighbor?"

Jesus knew exactly how to answer the lawyer, and of course Christ did not hesitate when he needed to show people where they must go. Jesus knew exactly what characters to use in verses 30-33 to explain just who our neighbor is. Jesus did not simply pick four characters for this parable, their identities are important to the lessons he was trying to share.

You can well imagine the reaction when Christ told the story and people heard the two bad guys in the story are members of the religious elite of the

time, a priest and a Levite. In the society of Jesus' day the priests and the Levites should have been the most educated and upstanding citizens in town. Priests performed sacrifices and other religious rituals. Levites took care of the Temple and served people religiously in ways other than the rituals. However, as we see time and time again in the gospels, they were characteristically arrogant, hypocritical in a lot of cases. They tended to treat others as beneath themselves.

The treatment priests and Levites might give others would have been particularly evident with the Samaritans. His part in the story would have given the greatest shock to the listeners at the time. To us it's not that big of a shock is it? Maybe it would be a great shock today if I substituted other characters.

What if I said a minister went down and saw the person lying beaten, and went on the other side? And that after him a deacon came, also saw the person, and went on the other side? And then in place of the Samaritan, maybe somebody who is Baptist, or Muslim, or Buddhist, or who holds no religious beliefs at all?

Suppose I say an atheist or agnostic came and actually helped the person after two Christians left him alone? If I said it like that, would the parable have a little more shock value for us? It had shock value at the time, and that helped it have meaning. And, of course, I'm sure it made the Pharisees and the lawyer at the time a little upset.

The Samaritans were looked down upon. They had some claims to Judaism but they were not pure Jews, neither genetically or religiously. Some of their practices stemmed from Jewish belief and other practices stemmed from pagan beliefs. Their genealogy had similar issues.

What we see here is kind of characteristic of Christ. He tends to, as the scripture says, bring down those who are proud and bring up those who are down. That's what's happening here. But I don't think Jesus was exaggerating in his portrayal of the priest and the Levite.

Do we know much about the person who fell among thieves? *We know absolutely nothing.* Not a thing. But what would the priest, Levite and the Samaritan have known about the man? *Absolutely nothing.* He had no clothes to identify him. He was beaten so badly he looked dead. All his valuables would have been missing.

To the priest and the Levite, this man on the side of the road was a no one.

For Jesus, our Christ, this was *everyone and anyone.* Do you see a really big difference in that perspective? Literature treats this as every man, representing humanity. Remember the lawyer had asked: "Who is my

neighbor?” He wanted to know to whom he was obligated, and in what situations. God required him to show love, but in what cases?

Jesus answered that question with a no-identity person. In other words, Jesus answered the question by saying, *anyone and everyone in need is your neighbor*. There is no way you can get out of that obligation.

### **Bible Application**

Genesis 4 includes one of life’s many biting questions: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

You know there are many people who either have never stepped foot in a church or hardly ever do so. There are many who have never opened up a Bible and read it. Yet many of these people can quote to you the parable of the Good Samaritan. That parable is often thought of as a nice story for us to tell the kids in Sunday School or Junior Church. The fact of the matter is that this parable is, as the Apostle Paul would say, really “meat not milk”.

In Hebrews 8:10 we read “FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

Jesus commanded us in Matthew 22:37-40: “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

### **Life Response**

Are we willing to inscribe God’s laws into our hearts? Are we willing to love our neighbor, realizing that anyone and everyone is our neighbor? Are we willing to become the Samaritan and do what it takes to help anyone that has a need?

Or do we stop and calculate the possible repercussions if we do as we have been commanded to do? “I don’t want to get involved. Don’t ask me to give financially to the stranger on the side of the road.”

Is our service to God and this commandment based on our convenience or have we truly engrained God’s laws into our hearts and into our service?

James reminded us that faith without works is dead. I ask you, does your faith even have a heartbeat?

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Have you ever turned your head and refused to help a neighbor because you did not want to get involved?

2. If you were a passenger on the bus from the beginning of this lesson would you have been willing to help the lady, or would you have been too embarrassed or intimidated to help?
3. How do you think you would feel if you were the person who thought their bus fare was paid for on the card only to find out there was a problem? How would you react?
4. Are you willing to accept the fact that anyone and everyone is your neighbor? If so, how do you move forward and apply the parable of the Good Samaritan in your life?
5. Is our willingness to help our neighbor something we tend to put a price on? If so, how much money would you be willing to spend? Are you willing to accept the fact you may never be repaid financially?

### Mary and Martha

**Golden Text:** “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all the parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.”  
(1 Cor. 12:12)

**Key Thought:** Mary and Martha were very different, but both served the Lord.

**Lesson Text:** Luke 10:38-41 (NIV)

<sup>38</sup> As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. <sup>39</sup> She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

<sup>41</sup> “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things,

#### Introduction

Do you have a brother or a sister? If so, you can probably understand the two sisters in our story fussing at one another.

A Sunday School teacher was discussing the Ten Commandments with her five- and six-year-old students. After explaining the commandment to “honor thy Father and thy Mother”, she asked: “Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?”

Without missing a beat one little boy answered: “Thou shall not kill.”

You can get angrier at a brother or sister than just about anyone, but you also feel a connection, a love that endures. To have siblings is usually to experience a love-hate relationship. A person can yell or scream at his or her brother or sister, but then leap to his or her defense if someone else is critical.

Mary and Martha were sisters who lived in Bethany with their brother Lazarus. Bethany was a village on the east slope of the Mount of Olives, just outside of Jerusalem. When coming to Jerusalem, Jesus would sometimes stop in Bethany.

Sometimes brothers and/or sisters are very much alike – other times they are very different from one another. Mary and Martha were both disciples of Jesus, along with their brother Lazarus. But they had different personalities,

which is apparent in today's text. Although most people show some characteristics of both at one time or another, you will probably relate more to one or the other. Try to identify whether you are a Martha or a Mary.

## **Bible Learning**

### *The Story*

Today's text is a simple story of an incident in the life of Jesus. This story gives us an insight into the personalities of the two sisters, Martha and Mary.

Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem and stopped at the village of Bethany. Martha, who was a disciple of Jesus, opened her home to Jesus. Martha was busy with all the preparations that had to be made, probably busy preparing a meal for Jesus and his disciples. If you have ever entertained thirteen guests you probably know that you can begin to feel overwhelmed by all that needs to be done. Martha felt overwhelmed.

Martha's sister Mary was also there. They quite possibly shared a home. While Martha was working feverishly to prepare everything for Jesus and his disciples, Mary sat at the feet of Jesus, listening to what he was saying. Martha became frustrated because she was doing all the preparation work, and Mary was not lifting a finger to help. It became more than she could take: "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Mary seemed oblivious to what needed to be done and to Martha's feelings of frustration. She was enthralled by Jesus' teaching and was not thinking about all that needed to be done to get things ready for thirteen house guests. All she wanted to do was sit and listen and probably visit with Jesus.

Let's look at Martha. She opened her home to Jesus. She was gracious and hospitable. Martha was making a good meal for Jesus. I imagine Martha was a great cook and was good at entertaining. If you went to Martha's for a dinner party the table would be set beautifully, the food would be excellent, and everything would be ready on time. Martha was a worker. If you gave her a task to do, it would be done right, done on time, and brought in under budget!

But Martha was bothered by Mary's not getting into the meal preparation. She didn't understand how Mary could just sit around while she worked so hard – I imagine Martha felt unappreciated and misunderstood.

Let's look at Mary. Mary seemed oblivious to how hard Martha was having to work, or if she was not oblivious then she was indifferent. Rather than working hard to make a good meal, Mary sat around and listened to

what Jesus had to say. (I am guessing some of you out there are pretty sympathetic to Martha!)

If you went to a dinner party at Mary's (or at a modern day Mary's), I am guessing the silverware doesn't match, and probably was just dumped in a pile in the middle of the table. The food is simple, something done in the microwave, or even better, carry-out! And there was more emphasis on the conversation than the food.

To which one of these two sisters do you relate? Are you more a Martha or a Mary? There is a marked contrast between the two. Martha is busy fixing supper – Mary is busy talking to Jesus. Martha opens her home – Mary opens her heart. Martha is distracted, resentful and worried – Mary is oblivious to all this and just enthralled with Jesus

Do you find yourself more like one than the other? Are you more a Martha or a Mary?

We have to notice Jesus' response to Martha, which begins "Martha, Martha." I don't think Jesus was berating her. Rather I think he is gently chiding her, and expressing a sincere sympathy for a dear friend. Jesus is telling Martha not to worry and let herself get upset. When worry gets us upset it is just not worth it. And he does say that Mary has chosen what is better in this instance.

### *Another Look at Martha*

Lest we think that Martha was just a worry-wart who was not spiritual and only focused on tasks to be done, we need to look briefly at the picture of Martha that emerges in John's Gospel. John 11 tells the thrilling story of Lazarus being raised from the dead. Lazarus, the brother to Martha and Mary, was very sick. The sisters sent for Jesus, believing that he could heal their brother. Lazarus died before Jesus arrived at Bethany.

When Jesus got to the village, Martha went out to meet him. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

"Your brother will rise again," Jesus answered.

Martha's response is very important. She was a disciple of Jesus. She had listened to his teaching. The belief she expressed reflected what she had learned from Jesus. "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24). What Martha believed about life after death was what she had learned from Jesus. What Martha believed and what Jesus taught was that the dead would live again. Death was not the final answer. Life after death would happen through resurrection, and this resurrection would be at the last day. This is exactly what Jesus taught: "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal

life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40). Martha did not say, “I know my brother is in heaven right now looking down on us,” for Jesus never taught that we would have life immediately after death. The Christian hope is to live again through resurrection that will happen at the last day.

Jesus then told Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (John 11:25). Resurrection in the last day is dependent upon believing in Jesus. Jesus goes on to say there will be some who will never die. He is referring to those who are alive at the time of the resurrection in the last day. (Paul also makes reference to this group in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16). He then made it personal by asking Martha directly, “Do you believe this?”

Martha responded by saying: “Yes, Lord. I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God who was to come into the world” (John 11:27). Martha believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah and that he was the Son of God. This is the same response that Peter made to Jesus when Jesus asked him, “Who do you say that I am?” Like Martha, Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Jesus responded to Peter by telling him he was blessed for that answer and that it was an answer that God had revealed to him. Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah, and he is the very Son of God.

Jesus did not say to Martha or to Peter, “That answer is not quite right. I’m actually not the Son of God, I am God the Son, the second person of a Trinity.” If that is what is true, why did Jesus not correct Peter and Martha? Instead Jesus called the answer “blessed.” Clearly Jesus is the Son of God, not God the Son. He is the promised Messiah.

Martha may have been too wrapped up in meal preparation when Jesus and the twelve stopped by her house, but she clearly had her theology correct. She believed Jesus was the Son of God, the promised Messiah, and she believed that believers in Jesus would live again through resurrection at the last day.

John 11 then tells the thrilling story of how Jesus resurrected Lazarus that day. What a miracle, affirming who Jesus was and affirming that believers need not fear death. Of course Lazarus later died again, and he sleeps awaiting that glorious resurrection in the last day that will happen when Jesus returns to the earth.

### *Another Look at Mary*

John 12 gives us another look at Mary. Jesus was eating dinner with Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. Martha was again the one serving the food. “Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was

filled with the fragrance of the perfume” (John 12:3). This act was criticized by Judas Iscariot because the nard perfume was worth a year’s wages. But Jesus saw it as an act of great love. Mary loved Jesus so much she did not count the cost. She was willing to give up anything for her Lord. Her love for Jesus was total.

### *A Remarkable Pair*

Martha was an efficient worker. She served faithfully and got done what needed to get done. She was also a remarkable theologian who clearly understood that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. She knew that by believing on him, people could conquer death through resurrection at the last day. Martha knew what she believed and why, and worked hard for the Lord.

Mary loved Jesus with all her heart. She was totally committed to him. She loved to be in his presence. Nothing was more important to her than Jesus. Mary would let nothing distract her from following Jesus – not meal preparation, not criticism, not great cost. Like the nard perfume she poured out on Jesus’ feet, Mary totally poured out herself in devotion to Jesus.

### **Bible Application**

People can be very different. We have different personalities, different interests, different strengths, and different weaknesses. We need people like Martha and we need people like Mary. The church needs hard workers who use their gifts and talents in service to God, to the community, and to one another. The church would be weaker if we did not have those people who roll up their sleeves and get the job done – whether it is fixing the broken pipe, teaching the Sunday school class, getting things ready for the carry-in dinner and cleaning up afterwards, or whatever needs to be done. Without people like Martha the building would be a wreck, bills would not be paid on time, classes would never happen, and things would not get done.

We are thankful for people like Martha who grasp theological concepts and clearly articulate them. Martha stated simply and clearly: Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and those who believe in him will be resurrected in the last day. In a world where there is so much confusion in regards to Jesus and our hope, we need people like Martha who know what they believe and can share simply and clearly.

And we are inspired by people like Mary who are totally committed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Mary loved Jesus so much that nothing else really mattered to her. The world is changed by people who love Jesus so much that they will give up anything and everything for him. When there are many distractions clamoring for our time and attention like Mary we must

learn to put our focus on Jesus and let nothing distract us from that focus. Even good things can become bad things when they keep us from the better things.

### **Life Response**

Are you a Mary or a Martha? In reality, most of us have a little of Martha in us and a little of Mary. We would do well if we all would learn to build upon our strengths, compensate for our weaknesses, and appreciate those who are gifted in different ways than we are. Bethany was a better place because both Martha and Mary lived there. Our churches are stronger when we have both people like Mary and people like Martha. Our differences can be our strengths when we learn to work together and appreciate one another.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. If you have a brother or a sister, how are you different from one another? How are you alike?
2. Do you agree that most siblings have a “love-hate” relationship with one another?
3. After reading the text, do you relate more to Mary or Martha? Why?
4. What were Martha’s strengths? What were her weaknesses?
5. What were Mary’s strengths? What were her weaknesses?
6. How do people like Martha help God’s work?
7. How do people like Mary help God’s work?
8. How can we learn to appreciate others who are different from ourselves?

### Are We There Yet?

**Golden Text:** “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV)

**Lesson Aim:** To understand that prayer should ultimately lead us to the good things of the Spirit.

**Lesson Text:** Luke 11:1-13 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

<sup>2</sup> He said to them, “When you pray, say:

“‘Father,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.

<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread.

<sup>4</sup> Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation.’”

<sup>5</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; <sup>6</sup> a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ <sup>7</sup> And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ <sup>8</sup> I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

<sup>9</sup> “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

<sup>11</sup> “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how

much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

### **Life Need**

I'm no Einstein, but I think I've discovered a new physical law. When I decide on a name it will have something to do with spouses and gravity. Over the years my wife, through her “out there” job in purchasing at a university, has met a whole lot of people. Without fail, wherever we go, she sees someone she knows. We could be herding goats on a slope in the Alps (unlikely, I know, but I'm trying to make a point here), and over the horizon would come a hiker she's met someplace before. These encounters often take place in restaurants as we're leaving the establishment, myself in the lead. I look over my shoulder and see her stopped, talking with someone she knows. I wait in the lobby, semi-patiently, smiling apologetically as I dodge frowning incoming customers. Seconds pass, minutes follow. Finally I decide to sit down. Just as my rear bumper hits the wooden bench, here she comes. Thus the physical law part. Just as I give in to gravity, her force initiates anti-gravity. I get up, we walk out. With my impatience still lingering I ask “Okay, now who was that?”

**YOU TRUTH:** Have you noticed some sort of unique “law” involving your family, friends, co-workers, or church, like when something happens and something else invariably follows?

What kinds of things make *you* impatient? Someone might offer, “Waiting for a certain prayer of mine to be answered.” That's pretty common. We pray in faith, yet grow uncomfortable, then a bit irritable, then maybe confused, or doubtful, or whatever. “Why isn't my prayer being answered!?” But perhaps it is. Perhaps it's just that our imagining of how life should turn out isn't a mirror image of how God is crafting our futures. We say, “After all, I know what's going to make me happy. Don't I?” God says, “Maybe not.”

**YOU TRUTH:** Have you ever become impatient waiting for a prayer to be answered? Share what you were feeling during the waiting period.

### **Background and Discussion**

A disciple of Jesus asks the Lord how one should pray. Rabbi Jesus offers his student a prayer pattern with the basic outline (1) praise (2) providence (3) petition (4) penitence. Then Jesus shares a couple of lessons about God's attitude toward the prayer and the pray-er, which we'll discuss below.

**YOU TRUTH:** When you pray, do you get more comfort from a general prayer (such as the Lord's Prayer) or a more precise prayer (addressing each

need specifically)? Why is that? When you pray, do you tend to feel more clearly and deeply God’s love, or His severe scrutiny?

Imagine today’s lesson as a Sunday drive through the landscape of the Spirit. What sights do we see along the way? What stops do we make? We’re spiritual tourists surveying the countryside of faith, making discoveries about prayer, the One to whom we pray, and where our travels will end up. Enjoy the ride!

YOU TRUTH: Was there ever a time when you were excited about taking a trip, but found the destination disappointing? Share with your fellow travelers. Conversely, did you ever have low expectations about a certain journey, only to discover that the destination was more than worth the tedious ride?

### *Sightseeing Begins*

Setting out on a journey of faith and hope, we believe we know our destination: it’s that one particular outcome we expect from our prayer. Immediately we’re encouraged by a huge billboard with a blue sky/puffy cloud background. On the ad is the promise, “GOD ANSWERS PRAYER.” Oh, boy! This is going to be a *great* trip! Then we become a little impatient, “Say, I wonder why we’re not there yet. Guess I’ll just have to pray more often, and with more resolve.” We beg, we fast, we agonize. “Okay, maybe this trip isn’t going to be so great after all.” The certainty begins to fade. Belief goes from white to gray to black. Finally we simply stop praying that specific prayer.

YOU TRUTH: Being honest, what’s your prayer personality like? After you’ve prayed for something a long time with no apparent results, do you tend to give up on the prayer, admitting defeat, or do you trust that God has a greater plan? (See Jeremiah 29:11-12 and Genesis 50:20.)

### *Along the Way*

“I’m hungry! When can we eat!???” Up ahead we see another billboard: “ENJOY FINE DINING AT DIABLO’S TACOS! ENJOY THREE OF OUR FAMOUS SCORPION TACOS OR OUR WORLD RENOWNED SNAKE CHEESEBURGER FOR ONLY \$6.66.” Suddenly you get heartburn. “Hey, look up there! It’s a fish and chips place. And they use real egg batter on their fish!” Hunger satisfied. The point is, even if it looks as though our prayers aren’t being answered, up ahead there’s something better waiting for us, ready to offer satisfying spiritual nourishment.

YOU TRUTH: (1) As we take off on a road trip (say we’re leaving for vacation/holiday), what unexpected obstacles might arise to hold up our journey? Share any personal experiences. (2) The Bible word “devil” (New

Covenant) comes from a word meaning “to throw across.” What are some obstacles that the adversary might throw across our prayer road to discourage our journey?

### *We’re Here!*

“I’m really exhausted. Are we there yet?” Hey, look! We’re close. Another billboard: FOR A GREAT REST BE SURE TO STOP AT THE “**SLEEP LIKE THE DEAD**” BED AND BREAKFAST – 12 MILES AHEAD! (It’s an Abrahamic Faith B&B.) At the end of the prayer road, we find peace. We didn’t necessarily receive the prayer answer we’d hoped for, but in the end it was good. God had led us to the place where we wanted to go all along, an oasis overflowing with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. All good gifts are now ours. (See Matthew 7:11.)

YOU TRUTH: Read Psalm 23 together. To what sorts of places is the shepherd leading His flock? In what ways can we compare the journey of the sheep with our travels down our personal prayer roads? Take a moment to think back on some of the spiritual “terrain” across which the Good Shepherd has led you. How have you grown spiritually because of the unanticipated “sights and stops” on your journey? How did prayer, and prayer outcomes, help you grow along the Way?

### **Life Application**

When St. Patrick’s Day was approaching one of the little girls in church passed around a few lapel buttons with sayings like “Better to be green than mean”, and “I swerve for leprechauns”. As I was pinning on the one she’d handed me, I noticed what it said: “I speak fluent blarney”. I looked up the word “blarney” and found out it means “nonsense, hooey.” Hooey? Me? Well, maybe a little – occasionally – unintentionally.

Supposing God handed you a button describing how He perceives your prayer life, what would it say? “Keeps eyes on road”? “Swerves often”? “Fidgety”? “Runs red light”? “Stops on a dime”?

In closing, pause together for a silent moment and ask yourself: “What would *my* button say?” Then pray for wisdom and a sense of wonderment to infuse your prayer life.

“Are we there yet?” Look around. Count your blessings. Maybe you’ve been “there” all along.

**The Yeast of the Pharisees**

**Key Thought:** “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28)

**Lesson Text:** selected verses from Luke 11:14-12:3 (Revised Standard Version, the Catholic edition)

“But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons”; while others, to test him, sought from him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and house falls upon house. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace; but when one stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his armour in which he trusted, and divides his spoil. He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” (v. 14-23).

“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it! This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” (v. 28-29).

“‘If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.’ While he was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him; so he went in and sat at table. The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner.” (v. 36-39).

“ ‘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.’ In the meantime, when so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they trod upon one another, he began to say to his disciples first, ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.’” (11:52–12:1).

*Lesson Background*

We have been following Luke’s account since Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem in Luke 9:50. The messages of lessons one through four are positive. The seventy came back from their mission experience with joy.

The good Samaritan demonstrated the golden rule. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus to learn. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. These are all good. But, at the same time, the seventy were warned of wolves. Robbers attacked the man on the Jericho road, and the priest and the Levite offered no help. Further, they both despised Samaritans. It was the Samaritan that not only showed mercy, but did so far beyond what one would expect. Martha was so concerned with the details of hospitality that she had no time to listen to Jesus as he made his way to the cross. Mary gave highest priority to the opportunity to learn Gospel principles from Jesus. Yet in the larger picture, Mary and Martha gave generously to the needs of those that followed Christ. Now we come into close contact with the Pharisees. In their zealous quest for righteousness they out-performed priests on duty in the Temple. The Pharisees separated themselves from sinners. Their standards were their own traditions, not the principles contained in the Bible. They added a whole library shelf or two of detailed rules on table fellowship, hand washing, tithes, etc. Jesus had summarized the Law in two principles: love God, love your neighbor. Another basic principle was to hear the word, and obey the word. They failed to accomplish this in their own lives. Even worse, they hindered others from hearing and obeying the word of God. They turned people away from Jesus.

*The Kingdom of God and Beelzebul (Luke 11:14-23).*

Jesus healed a man that was dumb. For Jesus, healing the man was very simple. The public health officer of the temple was the priest. The priest could certify that a man was well. God was praised, and offerings were received in recognition of the blessing. Priests had detailed procedures for exorcisms in the case of evil spirits. We would suspect that Jesus accomplished a healing that embarrassed the priests because they had no cure. So, they accused Jesus of working under the king of the evil spirits. Jesus showed the foolishness of their argument. What they failed to see, or didn't want to see, was that the power of God was at work. The Jews understood from the Old Testament that in the Age to Come the power of God would return to Israel. The sick would be healed. There would be peace. They did not understand that Jesus was the coming one. Even now he was showing them samples of power. He was demonstrating the love of God. So instead of accepting their Messiah, they crucified him. Now, nearly two thousand years later, the world suffers as we wait for the coming of Jesus to reign in righteousness in this world. Are we trusting in God? Are we building on the right principles?

*Hear the Word of God and Keep It (Luke 11:28)*

The creed of Jesus was so simple, and so powerful. Love God. Love your fellow man. Hear the principles. Live the principles. Jesus was obedient to his Father in all things. If we follow Jesus, then we should do the same.

*Light (Luke 11:36)*

In the Old Testament we have “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet.” In the Gospel of John we have “I am the light.” The Sermon on the Mount tells us to be a light. John Winthrop described his Puritans as “a city upon a hill” shining light in the New World. The principle is simple, but difficult. This is what the Lord desires of us. Are we a light in the world?

*Table Fellowship (Luke 11:38-39)*

A Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him. Jesus came into his house and sat at table with him. Jesus had table fellowship with him. What a privilege to dine with the Messiah, the son of David, the promised one of the ages. But as a Pharisee the man was so concerned to keep himself separate from any violation of the oral law that he could not experience the joy of the moment in helping others. He wanted to know why Jesus seemed to be breaking the law.

In the book of Acts Peter was instructed by the Lord to have table fellowship with Cornelius. He witnessed the Spirit of God coming upon Cornelius and his household. Cornelius was a Gentile, and very generous in treatment of the Jews; but he was still a Gentile. Peter had to understand the same issue that Jesus faced with the Pharisee. Paul, too, had to work with a similar issue regarding table fellowship, and circumcision.

Jesus faced objections to healing on the Sabbath. We today draw back from ministering to many kinds of people.

*Woe to you lawyers! (Luke 11:52)*

By the technicalities of the oral law, the experts in the law frustrated obedience by themselves, or anyone else, to God’s principles.

*Thousands Warned (Luke 12:1)*

“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” A Bible teacher once observed that, in his experience, super-critical Christians are generally hypocritical Christians. Our task as Christians is to love God, love our fellowman. We are to follow Jesus. We are to share the Good News of Jesus, and the kingdom of God with the world.

## **Bible Application**

Each of the highlighted headings above are worded so as to suggest an application. Discuss each heading in terms of how effectively our lives follow the principles that Jesus was pointing out.

### *A Personal Testimony*

I observe that in several of the situations above Jesus showed love, grace, and mercy. He did not beat on the heads of people who were already down and suffering. He had little patience with those who thought they knew it all, and were self-righteous.

When I was a youth I was very down on other kids who did not believe what I thought they ought to believe. I was down on them because their families did things that my family did not do. As a result, I lived in a very small, separate world. On the one hand, this way of life kept me out of a lot of trouble. On the other hand, I missed a lot in life. I limited my options of being a positive influence. It took a lot of living for me to see a larger picture of life. When I read the Gospels, and look how Jesus dealt with people, I begin to see a different approach to life.

Last year at General Conference I heard many fine sermons on the grace of God. Each speaker included a testimony to the meaning of the grace of God in his life. I strongly believe that we as a church need a lot more of that. We all stand as sinners in the need of grace.

Thank you, Jesus, for taking our sins upon you. Teach us, lead us, strengthen us by your Spirit. Lord come quickly. Amen.

## The Rich Fool – Covetousness Denounced

**Golden Text:** “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”  
(Luke 12:34)

**Key Thought:** Children of God find the way to be rich toward God.

**Lesson Text:** Luke 6:13-34 (NASB)

<sup>13</sup> Someone in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the *family* inheritance with me.” <sup>14</sup> But He said to him, “Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?” <sup>15</sup> Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.” <sup>16</sup> And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. <sup>17</sup> And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ <sup>18</sup> Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.’” <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, ‘You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?’ <sup>21</sup> So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

<sup>22</sup> And He said to His disciples, “For this reason I say to you, do not worry about *your* life, *as to* what you will eat; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and *yet* God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! <sup>25</sup> And which of you by worrying can add a *single* hour to his life’s span? <sup>26</sup> If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? <sup>27</sup> Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. <sup>28</sup> But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more *will He clothe* you? You men of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. <sup>30</sup> For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. <sup>31</sup> But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. <sup>32</sup> Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.

<sup>33</sup> “Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

## Introduction

An article entitled, “Wealthy, Motivated by Greed, Are More Likely To Cheat” (*Los Angeles Times* newspaper, Eryn Brown, Feb. 27, 2012) states that a UC Berkeley experiment found:

“People of higher status are more prone to cheating, taking candy from children and failing to wait their turn at four-way stops.

“The rich really are different from the rest of us, scientists have found – they are more apt to commit unethical acts because they are more motivated by greed.

“People driving expensive cars were more likely than other motorists to cut off drivers and pedestrians at a four-way-stop intersection . . . people of higher socioeconomic status were more likely to cheat to win a prize, take candy from children and pocket extra change handed to them in error rather than give it back.

“Because rich people have more financial resources, they’re less dependent on social bonds for survival. As a result, their self-interest reigns and they have fewer qualms about breaking the rules.”

What does this study seem to indicate about human nature? Why does greed seem to exist so consistently in the world in which we live? What does it take to restore ethical values in attaining or striving to attain the upper social economic status?

## Bible Learning

### *A Parable Denouncing Covetousness*

Our text begins with what appears to be a rather curt response from Jesus to a man who seeks his help. **Someone in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”** It is a rather bold request from a stranger, but no doubt he appealed to what he saw as a man of righteousness and justice to help him obtain a fair judgment from an inheritance dispute in his family. We are somewhat shocked by Jesus’ terse response. **But He said to him, “Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?”** Surely Jesus could have exercised the wisdom of Solomon to resolve the issue in this family. But he chooses not to

intervene. Rather, he takes the opportunity to teach an important lesson on kingdom living.

**Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.”** Now the man who came to Jesus asking for his intervention in a family dispute may well have had a just reason to seek recourse in overcoming those who would cheat him out of his fair share of his inheritance. But Jesus is more concerned that this man learn to live as a citizen of the kingdom of God. There is a time and place to seek judicial recourse in this world, but Jesus came to teach a different way of thinking and living than is customarily found in our world.

So, **He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive.”** Immediately Jesus sets the scene. The story is about a rich man who was blessed to possess farm land producing abundant crops. **And he began reasoning to himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?” Then he said, “This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.”** This is a very reasonable approach to solving his problem. Jesus is not critical of the man for making this provision for his successful crops. The problem comes with what Jesus says next in the parable. The man says, **I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.”** From a worldly perspective what the man says to himself seems very reasonable. Is it not the expectation of all of us to want to acquire wealth? **But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you.”**

It is here that Jesus makes his teaching points to all who were listening to him. It’s like he says: *OK, let’s say you are a very successful businessman and own well-run and productive enterprises. You can throw lavish parties, be a member of a plush country club, take tours and cruises to visit exotic places throughout the world, etc., etc., etc. But what if God decides your life will end today? What then is the benefit of all your productive efforts? Now who will own what you have prepared? All that success in business will now belong to someone else and you will have none of it.*

Jesus then states the punch line, **So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.** And the point is? This man was focused on the things that were important to him and ignored the things that were important to God. In real life things are not quite so cut and dried. Rich men attend church, donate to charities and support worthy changes needed in society. It is not quite so easy to separate the “selfish” from the

“benevolent”, the true God-fearer from the hypocrite. That is why Jesus went on to explain what God expected of His kingdom citizens.

### **Insights for Kingdom Living – Stop Being Worried**

Jesus provides three specific examples of how to acquire correct kingdom attitudes in our lives today. His main focus is on gaining the ability to “stop being worried”. His first illustration refers to our physical needs.

Reread verses 22-24. Jesus’ point is that the life we live today consists in much more than good food and nice clothing. Jesus likewise says we worry over our own physical attributes. Reread verses 25 and 26. He says we worry about all kinds of things, including things we cannot change. To us growing taller or living longer are hard things to do, but to God they are “a very little thing”.

Here Jesus returns to his first example and reminds the people how God cares for His created things. Reread verses 27 and 28. God cares for all of us. He cares for grass and flowers and birds, but only those who learn to think like God thinks will understand more about why He does what He does in relation to His own children in this life. These are God’s children of faith, the ones who seek to understand how to truly walk with God in this life. Obviously the man in the parable and the man seeking the just inheritance did not understand. By continuing to follow their current course of life they would not find the life God had in store for them.

Finally Jesus uses food and drink as sources of worry in this life. It is a different source of worry in this life but it is the same theme of distrust in the God who provides. **And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek.** The world worries about having healthy foods to eat, the best quality foods and recipes, and abundance of food, etc. **But your Father knows that you need these things.** There is something far more important to seek after, and not worry about: attaining kingdom citizen qualities in the inner being of who you are. **But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.** Why would Jesus insert fear into the equation? Fear is but another face of worry. When we worry about something we become afraid that we might miss something, we might miss the better part of life. God says, “you won’t miss anything if you are my child”, for God says you shall have the kingdom which He has prepared for those who love Him. And what better way to show we love God than to trust and do what He says?

## **A Tall Order Command**

What Jesus says to close this lesson goes back to address his response to the one seeking just redress for his inheritance. To all present Jesus made this bold statement, **Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys.** Your possessions in this life cannot buy you anything in the kingdom of God. You may not literally give all your possessions to the poor (although some orders of monasteries require such adherence). Really a change in heart and attitude toward our possessions is needed. If we see possessions as our avenue to peace and security we may end up like the rich fool in the parable, or at best miserable because we are constantly having to protect what we have and allow selfishness to take hold of us. We must see possessions in this life for what they really are, the outward evidences of what resides in our hearts. **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** The question to answer is “where is your treasure?”

## **Bible Application**

Taking a page from Charles Darwin’s ideas about the survival of the fittest, it appears humans are surviving, and even thriving, because of greed. Greed certainly helps keep others in their place. There is constantly a battle going on between management and workers, business owners and laborers as to what is a fair wage, fair working conditions, fair hiring practices, fair promotional opportunities. It is the age-old battle between the haves and the have-nots. The haves want to keep and exploit what they have. The have-nots want what the haves have, taking from them or in some other way gaining possessions for themselves. This is our world, the world of the survival of the wealthy fittest.

This is not the world of Jesus. It is not the world he taught to his disciples. His world is one where what is most valued are the things that mean the most to God. Those are not material possessions, rather they are matters of the heart and character of the individual. If someone is to live successfully in God’s eyes in this world, and especially in God’s kingdom, he must thrive on and be sold out to that which is important to God.

## **Life Response**

Now is a good time for us to take a truthful self-assessment of what attitudes and behaviors control the way we conduct ourselves in this life. Ask yourself the following questions in light of today’s lesson, and consider what your responses reveal concerning your relationship to this world and toward God.

Do you exceed the speed limit to get ahead of the other guy?  
Do you pocket the extra change given to you by mistake?  
Do you speed ahead of pedestrians to beat them through the intersection?  
Do you seek to outwit the rules to win a prize?  
Do you, because you have the power to do so, take advantage of others?  
If you won the lottery would you act like the selfish wealthy?  
Do you give little to charities when you could offer much?

### The Old “Bait and Switch” Trick

*Key verse:* “I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”  
(Luke 13:3, 5)

*Key thought:* Nothing ever got past Jesus, and the people’s attempt to get him to look at things their way instead of what really needed to be dealt with didn’t work, either. Jesus always gets to the heart of the matter no matter how hard we may try to distract him with side issues, so why not just be honest with him right now?

**Lesson Text:** Luke 13:1-9 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

<sup>6</sup> Then he told them this parable: “A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. <sup>7</sup> So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

<sup>8</sup> ‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

#### Life Need

People use various tricks to divert attention from the real issue. All of us have seen this happen, and we have probably done it as well. Children may try to get a parent to look at something else while they try to cover up something they did wrong, or a political leader will bring out an issue for constituents to think about while keeping them in the dark about a serious problem.

That is a “bait-and-switch” when you come right down to it. It is a distraction that is made to keep someone from knowing something.

It is easy for us to want to do this. We aren't really comfortable dealing with a serious issue. Do you prefer to brush matters, even serious matters, aside? We can't afford to do that when we deal with our Creator and His son, Jesus.

### **Bible Learning**

You can look at this passage as having a rather easy divide into three parts. The first part is the people's comments to Jesus about a horrible incident that occurred. The second part is Jesus' response to it. And the third is Jesus getting to what he considers the real issue.

**Verse 1.** Jesus has just finished speaking to the crowd about how they need to be wise enough and courageous enough to interpret the times (Luke 12:54-56) and the importance of being ready for the time of judgment, which is fast approaching (57-59). In light of these instructions, the people tell Jesus of a terrible incident in which apparently Pilate, the Roman governor over Judea, killed some Jews during a time of sacrifice. If you only looked at verse 1 by itself, it would be fair to say the people were merely letting Jesus know about something that happened. Matthew Henry speculates that there could have been several reasons this story was shared: 1) Simply to let Jesus know what had happened, 2) To confirm Jesus' words in Luke 12:57-59, that it was too late for these dead Galileans to be able to reconcile with God, 3) Desiring, since Jesus was a Galilean, to stir Jesus to action against the Romans because his countrymen died, as the conquering-warrior Messiah the Jews envisioned (not a suffering servant), 4) To deter Jesus from going to Jerusalem, thus avoiding the fate of those Galileans, or 5) To point out how terrible the people who lost their lives must have been, since if they were good, godly people, God would never have allowed them to die in such an awful manner.

**Verses 2-5.** The way Jesus responds to the comment in verse 1 strongly suggests that the last of Henry's reasons is the correct one. The reporters of this event may have held the thought "We have it together, Jesus, unlike those Galileans who died a horrible death and must have really been terrible people! But we are still here, which shows we are pleasing the Lord! Right, Jesus? Right?" Basically, the people were trying to do a "bait and switch" on Jesus by getting him to look at the Galileans and not at them.

But Jesus will have none of that attitude, either from the people of his day or from us. He gets right to the heart of the matter in verses 2 and 4, in which he says that the people who died both at Pilate's hand and when the tower of Siloam fell were no better or worse than they were. Jesus is emphatic and leaves no room for debate by anyone. Not once but *twice* he says "I tell you, no!" "No," Jesus says, "those people were not worse sinners

than you just because you are alive and they are dead. Even if their deaths may have been gruesome, even if they died young and in the prime of life, that is no proof that they were more wicked and more deserving of death than you.”

He then points the mirror at them and – not once, but *twice* – tells them that if *they* do not repent, they will perish just like those who died before. If they do not turn to God and settle their accounts with Him while alive, the time will come when they will die. It makes no difference *how* they will die. All their dust will eventually mingle in the ground, and no one will know how they died (notice that it is very rare, when you walk through a cemetery, for you to know *how* the people buried there died; you just know they are dead).

**Verses 6-9.** Jesus’ words reinforce the idea that the people were trying to distract him from the real issue, and he emphasizes the previous four verses. If there is no repentance from the people, they will perish. If the tree bears no fruit, it will be cut down. No results, no use.

The fig tree in this parable had all kinds of advantages given to it over a period of years; it was planted in a vineyard with a gardener that made sure it was well-watered and taken care of. Under those circumstances, it was perfectly reasonable for the owner of the vineyard to expect the tree to give forth figs. That is what a fruit tree does, right? But not this tree. It has done nothing but take up the soil for three years. In effect, this tree was getting a free ride from the man who owned the vineyard, giving nothing in return.

Frustrated, the man tells his gardener to get rid of the tree. Cut it down! After all, why should it use up the ground when he could get another tree in to seek better results? And again, you cannot blame the man for doing this. The tree should be bearing fruit, but it isn’t, so why bother with the tree anymore if it isn’t doing its job?

The gardener asks the owner of the vineyard to give the tree one more chance, and says he will give the tree additional care. If it bears fruit there would be no need for the owner to go through the work of replacing the tree. However, the gardener acknowledges the word of the owner and says, “If it still doesn’t give any fruit after everything I do for it this year, then go ahead and cut it down. If it still fails to bear fruit, I will no longer attempt to do anything to get this tree to do so, and I will do as you say.”

### **Bible Application**

I have contended for some time that people are no different today than yesterday or 3,000 years ago. Contrary to what some skeptics and atheists may say, we are no better than our ancestors. We have not evolved to be more civilized, more intelligent, more enlightened than our fathers and

grandfathers. The tricks and the deeds done in the past are being done by us today, with the only difference being that our sin can cause far more damage to others today than yesterday (contrast the 2,300 plus who died when the Twin Towers fell with the 18 who died when the tower of Siloam collapsed). Perhaps we no longer offer our children to idols as burnt offerings or have sexual rituals in temples dedicated to fertility gods. People may look at such things and say, “How barbaric. How uncivilized. We certainly are better than them.” The truth is, however, that we still do such things, just to different gods. We still offer our children on the altar of the gods of convenience, birth control and personal happiness. We still have sex rituals, but dedicated to our own pleasure rather than to a stone or golden god.

Our desire to distract people from what may be going on is no different from the people in Luke’s account, either. Just as the people were likely trying to distract Jesus from their own sin, we do the same thing.

Consider our attitudes when we see a disaster such as 9/11, Katrina, Sandy, or the droughts that have hit the south in the last two years. It is easy for us to think about people who have lost their homes or even their lives “Wow, they must really have deserved what happened to them. I sure am glad it was them and not us!” So we point at them and say to ourselves, and even to God, “They must have been pretty bad for that to happen to them, right?” Personal pride can be dangerous, it can blind us (intentionally or otherwise) to obvious truths. Truth is not always comfortable, is it? But we cannot dodge the obvious with issues like disasters or other troubles.

Consider, were the people who lost their lives when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans worse people than you and me? No, they were not! However, we have the words of Jesus – if we do not repent, we too will perish.

Were the people who lost their lives or loved ones when the Twin Towers fell on 9/11 worse people or greater sinners than you and me? Of course they were not! However, we have the words of Jesus – if we do not repent, we too will perish.

What about the great tsunami that hit the Philippines several years ago? Did the Filipinos deserve death more than we do, or were they greater sinners than we are resulting in the tsunami hitting them and not us? Of course not! However, we have the words of Jesus – if we do not repent, we too will perish.

Or how about when the children at the school in Newtown, Connecticut, were killed? What about their parents or their loved ones? Were their sins greater than ours? Were they worse people than us and this is why they lost their children? Absolutely not! Those folks are no better or worse than you

and me! However, we have the words of Jesus – if we do not repent, we too will perish!

We must never, under any circumstances, think more highly of ourselves than we should (Rom. 12:3), but instead we must look at ourselves realistically. If we have not endured such trials we should thank God that it hasn't happened, but not assume we are somehow "better than that guy." I suspect, however, that given the mindset of our culture in the West, it can be very easy to put all the attention on what "those people" did to lose their lives rather than look at it the way I believe Jesus wants us to look at it – as a warning to all of us. It is a warning that repentance, both a one-time turning away from sin and to God, as well as a day-to-day decision, is a necessary component in our walk with the Lord God and His Christ. A 19<sup>th</sup> century preacher named Charles Finney once said that repentance also carries the force of "considering your path" or "re-thinking your direction." It involves making the decision that you will stay on the narrow path (Matt. 7:13-14), and that when you realize you have left the path you will get back on. That decision is made for *yourself*. In no way do we have the power to force someone else to change their path.

Perhaps it would be good whenever we consider the victims of disaster to remember the Lord's parable in verses 6-9. We should use the deaths of others to remind ourselves that one day we too will die. Contrary to what we might wish to believe, death is not a far-off, imaginary thing that only happens to others. One day, we too will die, and when that time comes we will have no further opportunity to do anything, either for the Lord or against him. One pastor in Nevada quoted a commentator who said, "Every funeral anticipates our own." Because of this, "now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). The axe is at the root of every tree, and every one that doesn't bear fruit will be cut down and burned (Luke 3:9).

## Life Response

Are we going to start getting serious about what *we* need to do in our walk with the Lord? Are we going to start reading the Lord's words and apply them to our lives first and foremost? Or are we going to continue to try to bait-and-switch the Lord? How absurd to think we can trick the Lord God when He is the one who made us and knows all our thoughts!

We do not have all the time in the world to produce fruit for the Lord! Furthermore, as Matthew Henry wrote, "It is sad to think how many enjoy the privileges of the gospel and yet do nothing at all to the honor of God." Think of the advantages *you* have when it comes to knowing the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Is it bearing fruit in you? Or is it an academic exercise

and nothing more? It is one thing to know the Gospel, but it is something else to live it.

Christians are not called to just sit in the ground and do nothing while the owner of the vineyard cares for their needs. Christians are called to bear fruit (see Galatians 5:22-23). We do this by relying completely on the spirit of Christ Jesus to put to death the old man and bear on the new creation (see Galatians 5:24-25 and 2 Corinthians 5:17). It is a continual decision to live for Jesus. Although we make the initial decision at the time of baptism, it is not the end of the road. We must choose daily.

At the same time, let us not lose hope, either. If you are reading this, the axe is not yet cutting you down. You still have a gardener that is willing to help you bear fruit (v. 8-9). Jesus sees through our attempts to bait-and-switch him and his Father, and he goes straight to the heart of the matter because Jesus, like his Father, does not want anyone to perish. There is still time to settle matters with the Lord (Matt. 5:25). Don't waste it!

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Think of the last time someone tried to distract you from an issue they didn't want you to know about. What was the issue, and when did you discover what was happening? How did it make you feel to know you had been intentionally distracted?
2. Think of the last time *you* tried to distract someone from something that was happening? What made you do it? Did it work? How did you feel about it afterward? Were you ever found out?
3. Have you tried to distract God from what He may be saying to you? How so? Did you think you would succeed in getting God's attention from what He is trying to point out to you? Why or why not?
4. The author said that it is likely Jesus responded the way he did to the murders of Jews by Pilate because they were trying to distract him from what was happening in their lives. What do you think of this? Do you agree or disagree, and why or why not?
5. Have you ever had the attitude of "Well, he sure deserved that, didn't he?" If so, can you give general details as to what happened and why you felt that way? You do not have to be specific or give specific names.
6. What is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to you? Is it an academic exercise that makes you feel and look smarter than anyone else? Is it a reason for personal pride? Or is it more than that to you? Does it change your life for Christ?
7. What can you begin to do to change your attitude toward the Gospel and make it a life-changing message for you and others, rather than just a head exercise? Be realistic!

### Dinner with Jesus

**Lesson Text:** Luke 14:12-35 (New Revised Standard Version) – the verses are interspersed through the lesson.

#### *Imagine Dinner with Jesus*

Can you imagine how much fun it would be to go to dinner with Jesus? Would you like to do that?

All the way into the restaurant he'd be greeting everyone. The serving staff would genuinely grin back at his obvious happiness. While waiting patiently for the food he'd have everyone doubled up with laughter as he cracked jokes. His stories would regale you so much that you'd feel like you were in the presence of the greatest man on earth. He would bless everybody near him with mirth, health and hope.

Now, flashback to "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. Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, 'Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath, or not?' But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. Then he said to them, 'If one of you has a child [a donkey] or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?' And they could not reply to this" (Luke 14:1-6).

So if some Sunday Jesus came to your house to have dinner, what signs and wonders would he work with your other guests? If during dinner you checked the sports scores on your phone or glanced at the digital screen over his shoulder to watch replays of your favorite team, would he feel rushed and unappreciated? Would dinner with Jesus really be a joyous occasion? In his earthly ministry he referred to himself as Lord of the Sabbath (as in Luke 6:5), a statement that incited religious anger from his hosts. How would he respond if he sensed we neglect to honor him as Lord (of our lives)?

Let's say you have a guest list of persons you will have with you in your dinner party you've thrown for Jesus. Folks have arrived, you've shown them the reception area where they mill around with the Lord with wine and cheese and crackers in hand, then you open the doors to the dining room. Your guests watch where Jesus sits at table. Everyone wants to sit as close to him as possible.

"When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. '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; 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. 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. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted' ” (14:7-11).

How would you feel if Jesus insisted, at the dinner party you held for him, that you move on down from the limelight? What if he'd rather dine with people from your subdivision that you've never met?

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. <sup>14</sup> And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Why do we invite our friends and relatives for dinner? Because we enjoy them much more than we enjoy others on the fringes of our relationships?

Perhaps we feel a sense of duty, that the least we can do for our brother is to invite him to a meal. That seems a little like throwing some spare change into a special offering for a needy family in the church.

Or maybe inviting folks over after services is like making an investment, earning special credit in the eyes of those close to us. That smacks of rationalized selfishness instead of being generous.

Then again, your invite is a sign of expecting a return engagement from your friends. Sounds like a statement of superiority instead of a plateful of love.

Better than this is to pay for the meals of a family at a restaurant you don't know, and who will never discover the identity of their benefactor. That's like what Jesus said we should do in this passage.

### *The Parable of the Great Dinner*

<sup>15</sup> One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” <sup>16</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. <sup>17</sup> At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ <sup>18</sup> 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.’ <sup>19</sup> Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ <sup>20</sup> Another said, ‘I

have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’<sup>21</sup> 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.’

<sup>22</sup> And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’<sup>23</sup> 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.’<sup>24</sup> For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”

At the dinner with Jesus one guest mused that the scene depicted the great blessing every Jew longed for: the Messiah’s kingdom established in Jerusalem, with the hated Romans torched and every Jew honored forever.

Not so fast there, dreamer.

Jesus then shocked his hearers with a parable wherein three dinner guests at that much-anticipated kingdom supper made excuses about attending.

Since when do you purchase unseen land and untried oxen? And while the Law did exempt the newly married from military service, what of opting out on the Messiah’s supper?

Would an angry host dump the whole lot of Jews in favor of robbers, thieves, and foreigners – anyone he could find for his new kingdom?

Why would ordinary Joes be interested in attending this dinner if important religious leaders, politicians, sports figures and socialites aren’t going to show?

How many, do you suppose, of the 300 million unchurched Americans would accept Jesus’ tax-free, cost-free, no-strings-attached invitation to life, liberty, and happiness?

But: *Haven’t you heard? There’s no free lunch. There’s always payback.*

Or: *Can we pay it forward?*

Well, what happened in the day?

### *The Cost of Discipleship*

<sup>25</sup> Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them,<sup>26</sup> “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.<sup>27</sup> Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.<sup>28</sup> 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?

<sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him,<sup>30</sup> saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’<sup>31</sup> 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?

<sup>32</sup> If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

You can imagine how, when Jesus spoke so movingly about a free-lunch life, the crowds hung on his every word. Such talk got folks to thinking that Jesus might go straight to Jerusalem right now to set this all up.

So Jesus tells it like it is. “Whoever comes to me and does not hate . . . life itself, cannot be my disciple.” In other words, the imagery is clear. Jesus is number one, in front of relatives, friends, and me, my iPad, my smart phone/TV, my SUV (or ’Vette), my Packers season tickets, my lavish home (which has taken a lifetime to get).

Kingdom living will cost you. You give up all your possessions to get it.

Those words brought up short Christ’s enthusiastic followers. Are we to go camping with him all over Judea, never knowing a place to sleep, food to eat, a bath to wash away the day’s grime? How long will it be until we get to the kingdom’s palace of gold?

Jesus replies with two stories. What are your dreams of the kingdom? Spacious highways and byways, rooms in mansions as far as the eye can see, castles with high walls surrounded by moats and guarded with giant towers?

What if a staff is not hired, goods to sustain life come up short, or the builder runs out of funds to finish? What will happen to the dream? Everyone involved is humiliated, shamed into a life of folly. Nobody had the commitment to make the hope live.

Humiliation hits hard in the next story of a king confronted by an enemy twice his strength. He must choose to either raise a white flag in hopes of a peaceful solution, or go to war with troops that must overcome the odds. Cost counting is a life-or-death affair.

What will it be for Christ’s disciples? How committed are they to their king? Suddenly going to dinner with Jesus means more than a gay time at a party.

Jesus then zeroes in on the real dinner lesson.

### *About Salt*

<sup>34</sup> “Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? [how can it be used for seasoning?] <sup>35</sup> It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

A lot is said about the Old Testament’s covenant of salt and the New Testament’s salty Christians. When we hear the term *salt*, the understanding is that the things God addresses are eternal, enduring, never-changing, and

abiding forever. And salty Christians season culture with all the be-attitudes of God entering life, as Jesus identified in the Sermon on the Mount (be poor in spirit, meek, merciful, make peace, etc.).

Our postmodern culture honors a genuine life, something Christians maintain in a plurality of values. What behaviors are deemed essential in our day? Which ones should we preserve, like salt (as the Greeks said) “puts a new soul in dead things”? How do we conserve attitudes like honesty, purity, integrity, hope, and love?

We are called to put on a fresh face to life, in a world weighed down by despair, war, greed, and vice. As salt flavors food, so we bring a freshness and courage and confidence to bear on every incident, every situation, every place where we live. How shall we approach the crises of the world? Where can we point folks to in view of the doom we face in our climate, our politics, and our attitudes in our multicultural world?

Salt was also used on the land in Bible times. Sometimes a conquering army salted the fields before it left, to poison future crop growth. Salt was also used positively on ground, using small amounts to assist growth. Either way, salt changed the landscape.

How do Christians live so that the fine things flourish and the evil things shrivel? Where do we lead in growing green, pro-life education, saving the planet, combating abuse, disease, climate change?

What happens to salt when it fails? Of what use are we if we lose saltiness? How do we lose effectiveness? How do we refuse to become involved in community? We are to pray for our leaders that we may lead quiet and peaceful lives (1 Tim. 4:1-2). When do we disrupt the peace of our community? What do we do when it’s evident that persons in our community abuse others, harm themselves with drugs, etc.? What happens when we have no answer on such larger issues as abortion, homosexuality, social mores, corruption, politics, war and peace, etc.? What is the function of a Christian in society?

If salt is cast into the dunghill when it loses its effectiveness, what happens when Christians fail to function?

Jesus has made it clear: when a Christian loses saltiness, there is no good reason he should exist at all. In God’s economy uselessness invites disaster.

He who has an ear to hear, let him hear.

*And the Point Is . . .*

This lesson is full of questions. Which question challenged you most?

Of all the people who are your casual acquaintances, such as people you walk by in the store, see in church, or bump into at work, with whom will you choose to become better acquainted?

## The Lost / Prodigal Son; The Loving / Forgiving Father

**Key Verse:** “But when he came to his senses” (Luke 15:17)

**Lesson Text:** Luke 15:11-24, 32 (NASB)

<sup>11</sup> And He said, “A man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’ So he divided his wealth between them. <sup>13</sup> And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. <sup>14</sup> Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. <sup>16</sup> And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving *anything* to him. <sup>17</sup> But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! <sup>18</sup> ‘I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.’” <sup>20</sup> So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; <sup>23</sup> and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate . . .”

<sup>32</sup> “‘But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and *was* lost and has been found.’”

### Introduction/Hook

Have you ever been lost? It is a scary thing! Once, while hunting in Colorado, I stayed out too late and wasn’t able to get over the mountain to my campsite before dark. With the forest shading the stars I was completely turned around, lost. Luckily I knew the moon would be coming up in the east in a few hours and that then I could figure out which way to go. I just had to sit down and wait a while to be “un-lost.” Daniel Boone is supposed

to have been asked if he were ever lost, and to have replied “No, but I was befuddled for four or five days once.”

But, lost from God’s salvation? Now that is really lost. “We don’t want to go there!” Luke’s writing seems to incorporate outsiders, women, children, the last, least, little and lost more than the other Gospel writers did. In this set of parables, lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son, Jesus may be telling us what “lost” is, but he is also telling us about Abba Father.

## **Bible Learning/ The BOOK**

### **15:11-14 Two Sons.**

In the Jewish system the elder son usually received the larger portion of inheritance, to be able to provide for parents in their old age. (See Mark 7:11 and the use of “*corban*” for the perversion of that system by some. Jesus said, “you do nullify the word of God by your tradition.”) The younger son is blatantly forward in this case. *I want mine, and I want it now!* Maybe for the sake of the parable, Jesus turns him loose. I can just imagine what my father would have said to me!

Verse 13, “he squandered his estate” and verse 14, “he had spent everything” give a peek at the idiom “easy come, easy go.” The King James version says this son “wasted his substance on riotous living.” The NIV says “wild living.” The NJB says “debauchery.” The NKJ says “prodigal living” – I suppose they were trying to get the word “prodigal” in there since that is used in the common title for this parable.

Focus a moment on the notion of “loose living.” The Greek is about life *asotos* – “against salvation”. A related word is *soteria*, or “salvation”. Dr. Alva Huffer has an entire section on “soteriology”, the study of salvation, in his *Systematic Theology*. Note that “a” can be used at the start of a word in Greek for negation (as is also true in English sometimes). Think of “atheist”, not a believer in god, or “agnostic”, not professing to know. The young man was living life *against salvation!* This is *not* the position we need to have.

### **15:15-16 Feeding Swine**

Wait! What is a nice Jewish boy doing feeding swine? Jesus, the master parable teller, adds more intrigue. This kid has gone totally against his roots, first riotous living and squandering his estate, and now something *terribly* not-Kosher! Pigs were an abomination in the Jewish mind.

As a hired hand he is dealt one of the awkward twists of life. As a child of God he is reaping the consequences of being outside the protection of his Father, and of his father. How awkward must he have felt?

### **15:17-19 He Came to His Senses**

To me, coming to one's senses is the critical act for falling under God's grace. This would be similar to the attitude of the sinner versus the Pharisee in Jesus' parable: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" After God provided instructions to Noah, "thus did Noah" (Gen. 6:22). After God gave the magnificent promises to Abram, "so Abram left" (Gen. 12:4). Will we, realizing our position outside of the will of God, "come to our senses"? We may each have "been there, done that, got the t-shirt" several times. Psalm 51 is about coming to our senses, crying out to God "Cast me not away from your presence O LORD, take not thy Holy Spirit from me!"

Verse 18 shows the son's desperation, "*I will* get up and go to my father, and *will* say to him 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight.'" A point of order here: this now wise Jewish kid/son realizes the first aspect of his sin is against heaven, or the Father in heaven, God Himself. We were created by YHWH God, our ABBA Father. He knit each of us in our mothers' wombs, and when we sin we sin against Him *first!* And we need to acknowledge that, even when the sin hurts others as well. Yes, we are "no longer worthy," but we thank God for grace.

### **15:20-22 His Father saw Him and *Ran!***

It has been portrayed to me that the phrase "while he was still a long way off" shows that the father was still vigilant in watchfulness and prayer. I can clearly imagine a dad watching the hillside or road where he last saw his son, longingly hoping and praying for the child's safety and welfare. How many of us parents have stayed up late until we heard the click of the front door as a teenager came in? Now imagine the father seeing his son at the crest of the hill or the end of the road coming home. Hallelujah! *He ran, fell on his neck, and kissed him.* There is no lack of acceptance there. The Greek for repentance is *metanoia* (Strong's reference number 3341), it comes from "turning around" and shows the beauty of repentance in returning to the Father.

In verse 21 the son acknowledges his sin against God and his earthly father. The father's response is to *quickly* get the best robe and ring – and don't forget the sandals! (The son must have been barefooted.)

### **15:23-24, 32 Rejoicing**

God is *not* willing that any should perish. This is illustrated with the lost sheep, lost coin, and now lost son. The fatted calf begins the party – not a chicken, sheep or goat, but the best. For his son "was dead." Please do not underestimate the significance of the father's phrase "was dead." If we are living "*asotos*" we are as good as eternally dead.

We skipped a little with the older son. Many of us could have the elder son's dangerous attitude. In verse 30 he even went into detail about living against salvation. But the father assures him, also, "this brother of yours was dead and has *begun* to live, was lost, but now found." Thank God for grace.

### **Bible Application**

Every day there is application. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9, KJV). From the "smallest" sin to the "biggest" we need to come to our senses and return to Abba. What is your latest greatest? The application is for each individual. From the perspective of *all* in the parable, the younger son, the older son, and the father, how is this worked out in church every week? Which actor are you?

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How is that sibling rivalry going on now, after many years, in your family? Is there an aspect of *Everybody Loves Raymond*, but they love Raymond more than you? Do we, too, need to forgive an old family situation?
2. Of the "Big Ten" which do you struggle most with in terms of being *asotos* (against salvation)? How about Paul's big ten list in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11? Have you *been there*? Gracefully, Paul wrote "of such *were* some of you".
3. Can you, as gently as possible, discuss a time when *you* "came to your senses"? This could get interesting, but thank God you've returned to the Father also.
4. Can every sin be "against heaven" or God first? Why? Why not?
5. Have you ever had the older child's kind of feelings for sinners coming into the church? How did you overcome those? How can we encourage repentant sinners within the church?

## “Three Guys in Hades”

The Gospels never mention Jesus laughing, but I assume he had a sense of humor. Perhaps you agree with my assumption. But as you read Jesus' statements in the Gospels do you ever picture him laughing while he spoke those words? Whether you can imagine him laughing as he told his stories may depend on how you think he *told* them. With some of them it may be difficult to envision them as more than sardonic or satirical, but even if they were not straight comedy we may understand them better if we recognize their intentional absurdities.

### **Lesson Text:** Luke 16 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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.’ <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’ <sup>5</sup> So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ <sup>6</sup> He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ <sup>7</sup> 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.’ <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> “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. <sup>11</sup> If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? <sup>13</sup> 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.”

<sup>14</sup> The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him. <sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup>“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. <sup>17</sup>But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped.

<sup>18</sup>“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

<sup>19</sup>“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup>And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup>who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. <sup>22</sup>The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup>In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup>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.’ <sup>25</sup>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. <sup>26</sup>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.’ <sup>27</sup>He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house – <sup>28</sup>for I have five brothers – that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup>Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ <sup>30</sup>He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ <sup>31</sup>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.’”

## **Bible Learning**

This lesson is meant to be about the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, but we could describe it as a sequel to the first story in the chapter. That parable is about a steward who uses quick thinking to guard his future. Its theme is plain, since Jesus stated it for us, but it is not clear how Jesus meant the details. For example, was the steward guilty of mismanagement at the story’s start, or was he innocent until he changed the records to favor his reputation and future? If he was a thief from the beginning, then was he in having the rich man’s account tallies adjusted actually *correcting* them? In that way he could be simultaneously removing the evidence of his crimes

and improving his reputation with people who could help him. That could explain him being commended in verse 8 – or that commendation might only be satirical. We could see the end of the parable as one crooked person deciding he fits well with another one.

Some Pharisees sneered at the idea of needing to choose between serving God and serving money. Maybe they had a religious basis for that attitude. They seem to have assumed that the covenant people would experience a rigorous system of rewards and punishments in this life (John 9:1-2, 34). So maybe they saw their money as a reward for having pleased God, and even thought of the poor as justly punished. (Consider Deuteronomy 15:4.)

Jesus responded to their attitudes by complaining about their beliefs. One aspect of this is a semi-obscure comment about divorce. It seems Jesus was emphasizing the idea that the Pharisees were divorcing for the purpose of remarriage, with the idea of only being married for a short period and then switching with someone else. They thought of themselves as law-abiding, but in effect they were adulterers. And clearly their actions lacked compassion for their wives.

Jesus' second parable combines that idea of compassion with the first parable's theme of money. Jesus expresses the situation artfully and powerfully. Another rich master (or maybe the same one?) chooses not to exert himself in compassion at all, though he easily could have. Even the table droppings from his daily feasts are not offered to the lame beggar at his doorway. It seems that rather they are eaten by the wealthy man's dogs, who then go and lick the lame man. This parable serves as kind of a reversal from the parable of the good Samaritan. This is not a man lying in immediate danger, which even the Pharisees taught required a response. This isn't a man in urgent need, but in constant need. We aren't told that he starved to death, though perhaps he did, only that he eventually died – as did the unnamed wealthy feaster.

And the feaster is not unaware of the situation of the sufferer. Jesus made that point quite clear not only by describing Lazarus as having been laid (not even being able to move on his own, it seems) outside the rich man's door, but by the surprise reveal that the rich man *knew Lazarus' name*. That is intense lack of care. Even late in the story the rich man does not apologize for his past conduct – he doesn't even speak to Lazarus as though to an equal, but only to the one he thinks of as his “father, Abraham” (Luke 3:8), asking for Lazarus to be sent on an errand. The rich man chose to serve money rather than God. That he showed concern for his own family is not a point in his favor, with Jesus (6:32). He was not unaware of the expectations of God about compassion (expressed, for example, in Deuteronomy 15:7-8), he simply didn't act on them.

The end of the dark comedy here is in the statement that the rules were already clear, and that the attitude of the man's brothers would block them from changing their lives even if someone came back from the dead to prompt them. Charles Dickens reflected this in *A Christmas Carol*, having Jacob Marley reveal his torment and warn Ebenezer Scrooge of the perils to come – and then having Marley be rejected out of hand, assumed to be a vision resulting from indigestion. But Dickens' story was to have a happy ending, so through the cumulative impact of *four* spirits Scrooge comes around.

### **Bible Application**

Jesus was using ideas he had presented before, for example about the future benefits for the poor and troubled. It can be tough to get people to think carefully about their present actions based on promises for the future. Here Jesus somewhat reversed matters, having his audience picture a man thinking about his life once it was over.

Jesus didn't seek out Pharisees to argue with. Normally we just see him take enough time out to make clear for the rest of his audience why he doesn't trust these teachers, accusing them of hypocrisy, insensitivity, greed, etc. I'm not sure Jesus was seriously stating that the greedy could not change, any more than he meant to seriously commend the steward for deviousness. Jesus was open to making broad statements, as though to declare "prove me wrong" (consider Luke 6:24-25). But even if he didn't think this group of Pharisees was beyond salvation I don't think he figured his parable would push them into the right mode of thought. Still he had other causes to speak here, including to warn others against trusting the Pharisees (12:1), and to express for the future why so many would refuse him even when he had risen from death.

It is somewhat comical that a parable told to people who had missed Jesus' point is so often read in ways that miss its point. I doubt Jesus expected anyone to think he approved of theft, cheating, lying, or the Greek concept of a conscious afterlife. He was comfortable enough to refer to them in his parables – like it is possible to use a sermon illustration about a genie granting three wishes, or even one with "Peter" standing at the "Pearly Gates". Such familiar images can be helpful, in the right situation. But familiarity is part of the point here. Normally humor depends on things like context, tone, pacing, subtlety, and surprise reveals. Much of that is easily lost in translation, and when reading something from a different culture. Maybe you won't be able to see what Jesus said as humor, but I hope you can see some of its absurdities.

As has been pointed out by others, the second parable says nothing like what is proposed in modern orthodoxy about an afterlife. The parable does not have the saved in heaven, but with the unsaved in a different region of *hades* and able to communicate with them. That they are prevented from “touching” each other matters because these “dead” people have fingers and tongues rather than existing as disembodied “souls”.

The parable is not about an afterlife, and it is not totally about money either – it is about regretting decisions too late. But for the rich man to reveal his regret by offering an apology for Lazarus wasn’t in his character. Telling a parable with a realistic presentation of the future would make it clearly too late for the man to do anything but mourn (a scene other parables do show). Instead Jesus shows the rich man’s regret by having him mistakenly believe he could still make a difference for someone *else* – but Jesus avoids making the rich man a truly sympathetic figure by the way he continues to treat Lazarus.

The parable showed one way people ignore God’s desires, regarding compassion, but it could be told in various ways to address other issues. We should remember another point the parable makes: that God is open to saying “act” and then holding people accountable for not acting. Unlike a parent who repeats instructions (“take out the trash”, or “clean your room”) God has been willing to issue directions and then await the response, or the lack of one (Lev. 25:2-7; 2 Chron. 36:21). As James says, God approves of caring for widows and orphans, and living purely (James 1:27). And if we know what we should do but don’t do it we are sinning (4:17). There is no getting around this by following the letter of the law, either, not for us any more than for the Pharisees.

### **Life Response**

Does this parable make you uncomfortable? If the Spirit is prompting your spirit about something that has been left undone, don’t ignore that and don’t delay. It may be best to seek out the counsel of someone you trust, today, and confess your sins and be prayed for in return. Perhaps you need to seek out someone you have wronged. If you need to change, change now while you can. Work while you can, for the day is coming when all that we might think has been done in secret will be brought to light.

## “The Kingdom is within you”

**Golden Text:** “Praise the LORD! I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation.” (Psalm 111:1, NKJV)

**Key Thought:** In romantic literature the heart and mind are set against each other, however in Scripture we do not find this juxtaposition. The inner man is made up of both our thoughts and emotions. It is the combination of faith and obedience.

**Lesson Text:** Luke 17:1-37 (NKJV) – the text is interspersed through the lesson

### Introduction

The text before us today covers a lot of events and teachings; from offenses and gratefulness to the faithful being gathered in the kingdom. Each segment can easily fill a lesson, but taken as a whole this chapter gives a great picture of the kingdom within you.

### Bible Learning

<sup>17:1</sup> Then He said to the disciples, “It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! <sup>2</sup> It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. <sup>3</sup> Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. <sup>4</sup> And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.” <sup>5</sup> And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”

“Increase our faith” – what a response. It could very well be a modern response as well. How often have you thought “I don’t feel like forgiving”? (especially in the manner Jesus teaches us to). Reread verse four. Is this something that comes naturally to us? No, that’s why Jesus had to command it. Looking at it as a command, giving us no choice but to obey, it is easy to see why the disciples responded as they did. “If we are going to do this, Master, we need more faith!”

When we are forced to forgive we don’t always feel like doing so, though we know it is the right thing. Often this is an emotional decision. We may think that by forgiving we are giving something up – like our own

indignation, or control over the person who has wronged us – and want to know what we are getting in exchange. When we forgive, we ought to do so as we are forgiven. When God forgives us He does at least three things which we can do as well. One, He does not bring it up again to us. Two, He does not bring it up again with others. Three, He does not dwell on it Himself. When we say “I forgive you” to anyone, these ought to be the three things that we promise to do for the forgiven. Yes, even if they come seven times in the same day saying I repent (notice Jesus doesn’t say *showing* that they have repented).

*It isn’t a matter of faith.*

<sup>6</sup> So the Lord said, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.” <sup>7</sup> And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat?’ <sup>8</sup> But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink?’ <sup>9</sup> Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. <sup>10</sup> So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”

Forgiveness, as Jesus is teaching, isn’t a matter of faith. It is rather a matter of obedience. The famous mustard seed faith illustration was used to show what can be accomplished with even small faith. Faith and knowledge are not the same thing. Jesus’ point, I think, was that faith isn’t the issue. Speaking to his disciples he used the example of a servant in the field. When he comes in from a hard day’s work do you tell him to sit down and have something to eat? Or do you tell him his day isn’t finished yet, and to get you some supper? The critical point is, does the servant get thanked for doing his work? Jesus says he doesn’t think so. The idea of “thanks” brings up a couple of other texts: Matthew 5:44-48 and Luke 6:32-35. In both the same idea is brought forward. What are you doing that would bring you thanks? This brings us to verse ten. Even those who are obedient are unprofitable, because they did nothing more.

<sup>11</sup> Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. <sup>13</sup> And they lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

<sup>14</sup> So when He saw them, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. <sup>15</sup> And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice

glorified God,<sup>16</sup> and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.<sup>17</sup> So Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?<sup>18</sup> Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?”<sup>19</sup> And He said to him, “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

In these verses we see that what Jesus was teaching is put to the test. Jesus was able to cleanse these men, just as we are able to forgive others. It was before him, and he accomplished it. This is a good example for us to follow. One out of ten were thankful. What do you think Jesus’ reaction was? Would you react the same way, or would you want the acknowledgment of men for what you’ve done?

<sup>20</sup> Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation;<sup>21</sup> nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

We come to the center point of our lesson. The Pharisees wanted to know what the signs of the kingdom were. There is no outward observation, as Jesus said. This writer is a long-time advocate for the present reality of the kingdom. Not in opposition to the future kingdom, but saying that there may be things we have not taken into account.

An old friend of mine was rather “crusty”. His daughter came to me and told me how my ministry had changed him. She would know, being his daughter, so I believed her. My point is that sometimes the change in us isn’t seen by the outside world. It is, however, a change from the inside first. That’s where we learn to forgive, and to be obedient beyond what we are commanded. That’s when the kingdom of God is within you.

<sup>22</sup> Then He said to the disciples, “The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.<sup>23</sup> And they will say to you, ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’ Do not go after them or follow them.<sup>24</sup> For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day.

<sup>25</sup> But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

<sup>26</sup> And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:<sup>27</sup> They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.<sup>28</sup> Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built;<sup>29</sup> but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.<sup>30</sup> Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

Jesus turned his attention to give pointed instruction to the disciples. This we can take to heart. It is clear and direct for all those who are disciples of Jesus. First, there is going to be a longing to see the days of the Son of Man. Many desire that today. We want Jesus to return. The warning is that we should keep our emotional desires in check. Don't be swayed by those so much that we believe a lie and follow someone over here or there. The coming will be like lightning in the sky. Hard not to notice that isn't it? Jesus doesn't need to sneak back. No one is going to be able to stop him, no one at all. However, as grand and glorious as his return will be there are some difficult times coming first. Life will go on as it has, as Jesus points out. But the end will come suddenly. Of course there are prophecies and signs, but not everyone will be watching and waiting.

<sup>31</sup> “In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. <sup>32</sup> Remember Lot's wife. <sup>33</sup> Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. <sup>34</sup> I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. <sup>35</sup> Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. <sup>36</sup> Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.”

<sup>37</sup> And they answered and said to Him, “Where, Lord?” So He said to them, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.”

“In that day” signals a warning. It will happen one day. Not “some day”, this will happen in that day! The goats and sheep will be divided. We have a choice as to which group we're in. Believe the gospel and repent.

## **Life Response**

The kingdom of God can be found in you today. It may be the only display of the kingdom within your sphere of influence. Your idea of forgiveness may seem foolish to some, but be assured it is based on obedience because of the fruit of your heart.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. If our king was rejected by the world, what sort of treatment can we expect as loyal followers?
2. Compare mercy and forgiveness. How may not forgiving be an offense?
3. Thinking about the common phrase “forgive and forget”, is this more possible if we employ the three points from the lesson (God will not bring it up again to us; God will not bring it up again with others; God will not dwell on it Himself)?
4. How would you explain the difference between faith and obedience?

# The Pharisee and the Publican

**Golden Text:** “For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 14:11)

**Key Thought:** Spiritual pride is a dangerous sin common in the lives of many. Jesus wants us to cultivate humility and recognize our failure to attain to God’s perfect standard of righteousness.

**Lesson Text:** Luke 18:9-14 (NRSV)

<sup>9</sup> He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ <sup>13</sup> 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!’ <sup>14</sup> 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.”

### Introduction

“In Vienna in Austria there is a church in which the former ruling family in Austria, the Hapsburgs, are buried. When royal funerals used to arrive the mourners knocked at the door of the church to be allowed in. A priest inside would ask ‘Who is it that desires admission here?’ A guard would call out, ‘His apostolic majesty, the emperor’. The priest would answer, ‘I don’t know him’. They would knock a second time, and again the priest would ask who was there. The funeral guard outside would announce, ‘The highest emperor’. A second time the priest would say, ‘I don’t know him’. A third time they would knock on the door and the priest would ask ‘Who is it?’ The third time the answer would be, ‘A poor sinner, your brother.’” (*A World of Stories for Preachers and Teachers*, by William J. Bausch)

When the early Christians reflected upon sin they identified seven root sins that they considered to be particularly deadly or dangerous. These came to be known as the Seven Deadly Sins: pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, gluttony, lust. Of those seven deadly sins many considered pride to be the

most deadly dangerous of them all. Is pride really *that* bad? Is it worse than murder or rape or child abuse? Why should pride be considered the most deadly of the deadly sins? Isn't pride actually a good thing? Shouldn't we take pride in our accomplishments? We should pay close attention to the things that Jesus says, and to what he doesn't say.

We don't have a record of Jesus preaching a lot of fiery sermons condemning sexual immorality and he doesn't have a lot to say about violence either. That's not to say that Jesus doesn't care about sexual sins or violence. He told the woman caught in adultery to "go and sin no more" and he pointed out to the woman at the well that the man she was currently living with was not her husband. But Jesus seemed to give a lot more of his attention to pride, and some of the other sins that we wouldn't really think of as big deals at all, than to those things that we tend to get most worked up about. Why is pride such a big deal?

### **Bible Learning**

Jesus told many parables. Often the parables were difficult for people to understand, and afterwards Jesus would take his disciples aside and give them an explanation of their meaning. However this parable is so clear that it didn't really require any explanation. Its meaning was quite clear, and its audience would have had no trouble understanding the point Jesus was making. Undoubtedly it left them feeling angry. As Mark Twain once said "it's not the parts of the Bible that I don't understand that bother me, it's the parts that do." Somebody said that a preacher's job is to "comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable." Jesus sure seemed to buy into that. We see him often giving comfort to the poor, the sick, the broken and ruined, and yet he saved some of his hardest and most scathing rebukes for the "righteous people."

In his parable of the Pharisee and the Publican Jesus tells a simple story of two men and their approaches to worship. The first man, a Pharisee, enters worship feeling pretty good about himself and his righteous behavior. He was "confident in his righteousness" and "looked down on everyone else." The Greek word *peithō* means "to persuade, trust, have confidence/be confident." The man feels good about himself and the way he is living his life. He trusts that his religious life is adequate to please God. He is upbeat and confident in his appearance before God. Why? Because he is a "good Jew". He is a righteous man. He follows the Torah with meticulous care. He even goes so far as to tell God just how righteous he is and how proud he is of his accomplishments. He fasts twice a week (more than what was required of Jews) and he pays his tithes on his gross income, not the net income.

Compared to the “sinner” next to him, he was exceptional. Isn’t one of the ways we often make ourselves feel better about ourselves by finding someone with whom we compare favorably? I know it is for me. Maybe that’s why I enjoy watching *The Biggest Loser* on television. When I look at those people who need to lose 200 pounds it makes me feel better about myself. *Compared to him I’m not that fat.* Isn’t it amazing how, if we want to feel good about ourselves, we can always find someone worse than us to compare ourselves with? I’m told that prison populations have their own “pecking order”, with sex criminals and child molesters lower than thieves and murderers. Imagine a murderer standing before God in the prison chapel praying “God, I thank you that I’m a whole lot more righteous than that child molester over there. I never killed anyone who didn’t deserve it and I write to my momma every week.”

The main problem with pride is that it causes us to view others as “less than”, or a step below, us. Using others as a basis for comparison gives us a false sense of security in our own abilities. It also causes us to look down on others, and we fail to have empathy for those who we deem to be less worthy or less righteous than ourselves. It also causes us to become overconfident. For that reason it is very dangerous.

Think about Peter who was so confident in his righteousness that he swore to Jesus “even if everyone else betrays you, I will remain faithful.” Peter was proud of how far he had come in his discipleship. Remember, when he first met Jesus he said “go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.” He started out with quite a bit of humility, but over time and by some of the things that he experienced he became spiritually proud. In fact, he got so proud that he started believing that *he* could tell Jesus what Jesus could and couldn’t do. Peter’s pride was getting in the way of his ability to *follow* Jesus. He was so proud that he believed that he couldn’t fail. Of course he did fail. He fell, hard, by denying Jesus three times. It was only after his lesson in the danger of pride that Peter was truly able to receive the healing mercy and forgiving grace that Jesus had to offer to him. Peter was finally ready to minister the healing love of Jesus after his failure helped to rid him of his pride.

Some of the most effective evangelists and pastoral caregivers are recovering sinners. They know what it is to be broken. They know what it is to be utterly dependent upon the grace of God. The Publican in Jesus’ parable knows what brokenness is all about. He knows that he’s not worthy of God. He knows that there are things in his life that are not right with God. Of course, there are things in the Pharisee’s life that aren’t right with God either, but he doesn’t know it yet. Failure is our teacher. The Publican has been taught well by failure. He has learned utter dependences upon God.

## **Bible Application**

In Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12 Step recovery groups, the first step is always basically the same “we admitted that we were powerless over [alcohol/drugs/sex/food/insert sin of choice]”. That’s got to be a pretty humbling experience, to admit to letting an addiction to something take over your life. At AA meetings people introduce themselves by saying “my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m an alcoholic.” What would our worship services be like if we started them out in that kind of way? “Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I looked at pornography on the internet five times this week.” “Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I love to gossip about other people and I’ve talked about most of you.” “Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m addicted to food. When I’m stressed out instead of praying I grab a bag of Oreos and eat them all.”

The difference between an addict in a 12-step group and a person in church is that the addicts admit that they actually sin, but often the people in church do a good job of hiding their sins from others, and most tragically, themselves. When will we start to gain a victory over our sins? When we begin to admit to ourselves, and to others, how broken we are. Too often that only happens when God strips away our pride and humbles us. Proverbs 16:18 says: “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” Jesus said it this way: “For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

One of the disconcerting and delightful teachings of the master was: “God is closer to sinners than to saints.” This is how he explained it: “God in heaven holds each person by a string. When you sin you cut the string. Then God ties it up again, making a knot – and thereby bringing you a little closer to him. Again and again your sins cut the string – and with each further knot God keeps drawing you closer and closer. (Ernest Kurtz, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning*)

Fourth-century theologian Augustine wrote: “O happy fault that merited such and so great a Redeemer.” The idea is that without an awareness of our sinful condition we would fail to grasp the enormity of God’s grace. Perhaps this is what Paul had in mind when he wrote “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8). Don’t take that as an excuse to sin, but as a happy reminder that Christ died to save us from the consequences of our sins and to demonstrate the awesomeness of God’s grace.

## **Life Response**

Jesus obviously told this story to impress upon us the importance of approaching God with utter humility. Too often we, like the Pharisee in the

story, put on a mask and pretend to be better or holier than we truly are. I think that much of the hostile reaction that many in the world have towards Christianity is not to God or to Jesus Christ or even to the message of the Gospel, I think they are hostile to Christians who pretend to be holier or more righteous than we really are. Can we be honest with God, and with each other, about who we are, our total brokenness and desperate need for God’s mercy and grace? Would that not tend to draw people to God rather than pushing people away from God?

Thomas Merton referred to the mask of holiness we wear as part of the False Self. “All sin starts from the assumption that my false self, the self that exists only in my own egocentric desires, is the fundamental reality of life to which everything else in the universe is ordered.” (*New Seeds of Contemplation*). The fundamental reality of life is not the image that I’m creating for myself and all the world to see. That false self is an idol, and idols need to be destroyed. The fundamental truth is God, and when we allow His true light to shine through us, then we become our true or authentic self. We must begin by stripping away the pretense of holiness, and becoming real, so that true holiness can come in and transform us. That requires true and honest confession of who we are. It was the Publican who left the Temple truly justified (“just-as-if-I’d never sinned”) because he laid down all pretending and understood who he was. Who is it? “A poor sinner, your brother”, justified! So the question each of us must ask ourselves is “Who am I?” There is an accompanying question to help clarify: Do I want to *appear* to be righteous, or do I want to *be* righteous? There is a big difference.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think pride is included in the list of Deadly Sins? What is so deadly about pride?
2. Why does Jesus reserve some of his most scathing rebukes for the “righteous people”? If he were walking around today who might he be rebuking?
3. Why is comparing ourselves to others dangerous?
4. What can Peter’s experience teach us about the danger of pride?
5. What can Christians learn from AA and other 12-step programs about overcoming sin?
6. What is the danger of living out of the False Self?
7. Is it more important for you to *appear* to be righteous or for you to *be* righteous?
8. Who are you?

## Jesus at Zaccheus' House

**Golden Text:** “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

**Key Thought:** As followers of Christ, we have willingly given ourselves to speak the words he spoke. We have all been given the ability to share the good news of God’s kingdom. We also have the responsibility to share the good news of how the man Jesus came to be both God’s Christ and our Lord. We are servants of the most high God and the most noble of men. Let’s not hide it!

**Lesson Text:** Luke 19:1-27 (NKJV)

<sup>19:1</sup> Then *Jesus* entered and passed through Jericho. <sup>2</sup> Now behold, *there was* a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. <sup>3</sup> And he sought to see who *Jesus* was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that *way*. <sup>5</sup> And when *Jesus* came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” <sup>6</sup> So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. <sup>7</sup> But when they saw *it*, they all complained, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.”

<sup>8</sup> Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.”

<sup>9</sup> And *Jesus* said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; <sup>10</sup> for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

<sup>11</sup> Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. <sup>12</sup> Therefore He said: “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. <sup>13</sup> So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Do business till I come.’ <sup>14</sup> But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We will not have this *man* to reign over us.’

<sup>15</sup> “And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be

called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. <sup>16</sup> Then came the first, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned ten minas.’ <sup>17</sup> And he said to him, ‘Well *done*, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’ <sup>18</sup> And the second came, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned five minas.’ <sup>19</sup> Likewise he said to him, ‘You also be over five cities.’

<sup>20</sup> “Then another came, saying, ‘Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. <sup>21</sup> For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.’ <sup>22</sup> And he said to him, ‘Out of your own mouth I will judge you, *you* wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. <sup>23</sup> Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?’

<sup>24</sup> “And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take the mina from him, and give *it* to him who has ten minas.’ <sup>25</sup> (But they said to him, ‘Master, he has ten minas.’) <sup>26</sup> For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. <sup>27</sup> But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay *them* before me.’”

## Introduction

Today’s lesson recounts Jesus going to Zaccheus’ home in Jericho. His disciples listened to Jesus’ encounter with Zaccheus. They then mistakenly thought, “the kingdom of God would appear immediately” (19:11). Jesus told a story with a point, “another parable” to enlighten their understanding of Scripture’s plan. A week later Jesus retold the same story with a focus on God’s kingdom. But it was not until after his resurrection that they realized the meaning of these parables. Jesus

“opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

Then he said to them, ‘Thus it is written and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.’” (Luke 24:44-48).

While we preach the gospel of God’s kingdom and the good news concerning the name of Jesus, our Lord and Christ, we await the return of the “nobleman” from the presence of his God and King.

## Bible Learning

**19:1-10 Zaccheus . . .** Only Luke tells about this Jew whose stature was noticeably challenged. Zaccheus was “a wee little man” as the children’s

song goes. Too short to see over the crowds, he climbed a sycamore fig tree. Jesus called him down and said, “today, I must stay at your house.” At his house their’s was a conversation between two men of righteous stature, Jesus and Zaccheus.

**was a chief tax collector . . .** Scorned by the leaders of Israel because they worked for the enemy, Rome, these people were under rabbinic ban from collecting the taxes. You will have heard of “publicans”, the name comes from the title the Romans used for them: “publican.” Their job was to assess and collect land, income, poll and merchant taxes according to Roman law. As “**chief**” among the tax collectors, Zaccheus was well paid for his work. Luke recorded John the Immerser’s response to tax collectors who wanted to be baptized, “Collect no more than what is appointed for you.” Reputation, rightly or wrongly assigned, was they were cheats and overcharged the unsuspecting Jew, so made themselves rich by misrepresenting the “appointed” tax on the people. This public suspicion was answered by Zaccheus in two ways (v. 8), “**I give half my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.**”

**Editors’ note:** The verbs “give” and “restore” are in a present tense so they could be describing 1) Zaccheus’ ongoing behavior, i.e., he has already been doing these things and will continue to do so, or 2) his intention right then about his future, i.e, “I say right now that I will give half my goods to the poor.” The author has the understanding that Zaccheus is describing his ongoing practice. This editor suggests that Jesus’ statement that “the son of man came to seek and to save the lost” would indicate that life has changed for Zaccheus.

**he also is a son of Abraham** By these words, Jesus declared Zaccheus a righteous man. Jesus publicly argued, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham” (John 8:39). When purchasing land to bury his wife, Sarah (Genesis 23), Abraham asked the Hittites in whose land he resided to give him a fair price. They respectfully offered him the cave of Machpelah at no charge. But Abraham insisted he would pay the fair price they set for it. Zaccheus insisted he (and those under him) exact only the amount Rome assessed as taxes, nothing more. Any mistakes he reimbursed four times over, a true son of Abraham who lived the faith of Abraham. “Salvation has come to this house” because each stood in the presence of another who was righteous.

**19:11 Now as they heard these things . . .** The disciples heard the exchange between Jesus and Zaccheus. “Salvation has come to this house”

may be interpreted as the disciples soon used the term “Hosanna” (which means “Save now”, John 12:13). The hope of Israel was as Zacharias (the father of John the Immerser) stated, “that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him [the Lord God] without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life” (Luke 1:74). The salvation of Israel was to be when God restores the kingdom to Israel. Therefore, to Jesus’ disciples, who believed Jesus was the king of Israel, the thought seemed appropriate “that the kingdom of God would immediately appear.”

**19:12 parable . . . a certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return** The Jews were familiar with a similar story. An Idumaeen, King Herod the Great, had gone to Rome to purchase the right from Rome to rule over the Jews. Herod returned, took the throne, and began to rule according to the authority given him by Rome. His sons continued after him and one still ruled in Galilee when Jesus told this story.

**19:14 his citizens hated him . . . We will not have this man to reign over us.** Let’s consider the “citizens” of this nobleman’s kingdom. Jesus “came unto his own, and his own did not receive him” (John 1:11). The Jews’ leaders rejected him as their Messiah, the one to be their king. One week after telling this parable, their hatred would become fully evident in their response to Pilate’s words, “Behold your king! But they cried out, ‘Away with him! Crucify him! . . . We have no king but Caesar!’” (John 19:14-15). But to Pilate’s question, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus responded, “My kingdom is not of this time. . . . You rightly said that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this I have come into the world” [read Luke 1:30-35 with Matthew 2:1-6; also look up the comparable Old Testament texts]. In his final public words to his countrymen Jesus pronounced God’s judgment on their leaders and the whole Jewish nation, “Your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. 23:38). After his ascension the Jews severely persecuted his followers, just as he prophesied in Matthew 23:34-36; 24:9-12; Luke 19:41-44). On one occasion, some of the Gentiles in Antioch Pisidia who heard Paul and Barnabas preach about the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (fathers of the Jewish nation) persuaded them to teach on the following Sabbath.

“But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord [Jehovah] has commanded us: “I have set you

as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth”” (Acts 13:42-47).

Thirty years later, a few years short of A.D. 70, Paul added this judgment on the Jews “who killed both the Lord Jesus and their prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thess. 2:14-16). For nearly 2000 years most Jews have rejected Jesus as Messiah, looking for another or none at all. One day when Jesus reigns they will say,

“What are these wounds in your hands?” Then he will answer, “Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends”. . . And it shall come to pass in all the land, says the LORD [Jehovah], that two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my Name, and I will hear them: I will say, “It is My people; and they shall say, ‘The LORD [Jehovah] is my God’” (Zech. 13:6-9, KJV).

**19:13 So, he called ten of his servants . . . ‘Do business till I come’**

Jesus is the “nobleman.” So, what did Jesus give his servants? Not money as in the story. He said to them, “you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). And, “you shall be witnesses of these things” (that Christ had to suffer, die, and rise again, Luke 24:45-48). He commanded, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them . . . teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). All that Jesus commanded included the message about the kingdom of God in all his parables to the Jews (Matt. 4:17, 23; Mark 1:14-15). Jesus gave his servants the message of salvation, the true and complete Gospel message.

**19:15-19 how much every man had gained . . . Well done.** To his faithful twelve Jesus described the meaning of “Well done”: “Assuredly, I say unto you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28-28). Jesus added, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or fathers or mother or wife or children or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”

**19:20-26 here is your mina, which I have kept . . . Take the mina from him . . . even what he has shall be taken away from him.** In his later telling the same story of a nobleman (Matt. 25:14-30), Jesus added this

about the servant who chose no gain over even getting interest for his money, “And cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (v. 30). In James 4:17 the half-brother of Jesus wrote: “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does it not, to him it is sin.”

**Editors’ note:** It is possible that in Luke’s version of this parable the unprofitable servant loses what he has but does not receive the fate of those who opposed the nobleman’s rule. This would be similar to Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 that not every Christian’s works will stand the test of fire but everyone who builds upon the foundation of Jesus Christ will be saved.

### **Bible Application**

“But we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of our soul” (Heb. 10:39). The lessons we learn from observing Jesus at Zaccheus’ house lay out the role we must play as just and righteous sons of God living by faith. Our Christian purpose expressed in Jesus’ parable of the nobleman may be summed up in the words of Paul:

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifest action of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the spirit of God. But even if our gospel be veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:3).

We are “children of the light” if we persist in the belief that Jesus is the Christ and the son of the living God. We are “children of the light” if we proclaim the kingdom of God on earth. We use the “mina” Jesus left us if we do not hide this Gospel of God concerning His son Jesus, His anointed one and our Lord. If others believe this message to the salvation of their souls, we have gained above what Jesus left us, because we have done the will of His Father who is in heaven. We have gained an entrance into the kingdom of God, for both ourselves and those who hear us (1 Tim. 4:16).

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. From examining Zaccheus' decisions what do you see that showed his righteous life of loving God and loving his neighbor as himself?
2. How far are we willing to go so our actions will show the Gospel of God to others?
3. How are we to judge the faithful and unfaithful servant (include 1 Corinthians 3:1-23; 4:1-5)?
4. What other examples of faithful teachers of the Gospel can you cite (include today's faithful whom you know)?
5. How can you expand on Israel's relationship to God today, even while they reject Jesus (Romans 9, 11)? In what ways should Christians support Israel?
6. What other Scriptures establish the message of the restoration of Israel as part of the Gospel God spoke to Abraham (Gal. 3:8)?
7. What is the importance of the two-fold Gospel message: the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:5, 12; 1 Peter 1:3-12)?