

Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem

Golden Text: “saying: “Blessed *is* the King who comes in the name of the LORD!” Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38)

Lesson Text: Luke 19:28-48 (NKJV)

²⁸ When He had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.
²⁹ And it came to pass, when He drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mountain called Olivet, *that* He sent two of His disciples, ³⁰ saying, “Go into the village opposite *you*, where as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Loose it and bring *it here*. ³¹ And if anyone asks you, ‘Why are you loosing *it*?’ thus you shall say to him, ‘Because the Lord has need of it.’”

³² So those who were sent went their way and found *it* just as He had said to them. ³³ But as they were loosing the colt, the owners of it said to them, “Why are you loosing the colt?”

³⁴ And they said, “The Lord has need of him.” ³⁵ Then they brought him to Jesus. And they threw their own clothes on the colt, and they set Jesus on him. ³⁶ And as He went, *many* spread their clothes on the road.

³⁷ Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, ³⁸ saying:

“Blessed *is* the King who comes in the name of the LORD!
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹ And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.”

⁴⁰ But He answered and said to them, “I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.”

⁴¹ Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴² saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, ⁴⁴ and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

⁴⁵ Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, ⁴⁶ saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house is a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”

⁴⁷ And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, ⁴⁸ and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.

Introduction

Every year here in East Peoria a volunteer community group organizes the Festival of Lights for the Saturday night after Thanksgiving to introduce the Christmas season. The event is kicked off by a parade that includes a few marching bands and several floats that consist of Christmas lights strung on metal frameworks to create shapes ranging from an apple to the Starship Enterprise. It is a major draw for the community, with people coming from all over the region. We are very fortunate for the route to run right by the front door of the church.

Parades have long been a way of drawing attention, usually as a prelude to something special. All football bowl parades happen before the games. Jesus' followers saw His triumphal entry into Jerusalem as the prelude to his assuming the role of promised deliverer. All these centuries later we see that the week's events brought an entirely different picture of the Messiah than had been expected for many preceding centuries.

Bible Learning

Any time we read from the Gospel of Luke it is important to consider why Luke wrote this account of Jesus' life. In the first four verses of chapter one Luke addressed an individual named Theophilus, who had evidently been instructed in the life of Jesus and what he had taught his disciples. What Luke says about his reason for writing the letter seems to indicate that many have tried to write about these things who did not have first-hand experience, as well as others with first-hand experience, which made Luke ask himself if he should research and write an orderly account of the life of Jesus.

In verse four Luke stated that his purpose was to ensure Theophilus that what he has been taught was in fact accurate. If we continue that intention throughout the book Luke seems to assure us, also, that what we read accurately records what happened.

Fewer incidents are covered in Luke's account than in Mark's version (chapter 11). Mark indicates Jesus entered the city the first day and basically looked things over, including going to the Temple. He then departed for the village of Bethany with the Twelve and returned the next day. Along the way he tried to find fruit on the fig tree and condemned it for lacking fruit. (The most confusing part of that condemnation is that it wasn't the season for figs, but that is another lesson.) Upon reentering the city and the Temple

Jesus made the ruckus that seems to be the straw that broke the camel's back.

Bible Application

Background - As is the case with many specific events throughout the life of Jesus, the triumphal entry is deemed to be spoken of in Daniel 9:24-27. Without getting into a long essay describing how it fits, the spans of time that are described as passing before "Messiah the Prince" appears hinge to the command to restore Jerusalem. That command was issued by Artaxerxes in 445 B.C. Once calculations have been made (using a 360-day Jewish calendar, and taking into account the previous instances when Jesus did not accept the mantle of "king"), it appears that his acceptance of that title at His entry into Jerusalem fits the exact time between the 69th and 70th weeks. (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*)

The First Event – v. 28-34. Many moments during Jesus' ministry give us pause to realize how he must have perplexed those who followed him. The commissioning of two followers to "Go into the village opposite *you*, where as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Loose it and bring *it here*." is such a moment. Should they have asked if it was right? The colt's owner seems to have allowed this with no more question than "who wants it?" Doesn't that seem unusual?

The Second Event – v. 35-38. This particular parade was a bit different than what most of us are used to. It is more like the ticker-tape parades New York is known for, as when they welcomed service people returning from WWII. The palm fronds and shouting are reminiscent of ticker tape and the cheers and shouting of grateful citizens.

The Third Event – v. 39-40. The parade was not without incident. Evidently some in the crowd, important people, were not happy with all the attention Jesus received. They did not deem the noise and demonstration of admiration from the people to be proper. They demanded that Jesus rebuke the disciples; in short, they wanted Jesus to tell them to calm down and shut up. It seems that Jesus, who had not expressed much admiration for these same authorities in the past, was not shy about responding rather defiantly. He replied that if the people were not allowed to praise Jesus, then the rocks would. What a beautiful retort, as well as an inspiring image.

The Fourth Event – v. 41-44. These verses indicate how Jesus felt even before he reacted to the sellers in the Temple. Evidently things he saw disturbed him enough that he was brought to tears. Essentially he says that they should have known the prophecies of Daniel well enough to have expected his coming.

The Fifth Event – v. 45-48. The cleansing of the Temple is probably a lesson by itself. Suffice it to say that up until now the Jewish leaders had tolerated Jesus’ actions and teachings, though not always easily. However this event directly impacted them, and they lost all patience. In fact they “sought to destroy him” (v. 48).

Life Response

So, what does this story teach us? After all, it seems to be nothing more than a historical account of some of the final events of Jesus’ life. If we put ourselves in the positions of the Twelve, other disciples, or members of the city’s population, how would we react? Can we see ourselves proclaiming, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”? Are we willing to hold to our faith no matter what the problems? Jesus expects us to stay the course. God expects us to recognize what price was paid for our salvation. We should expect those same things from ourselves.

Questions for Discussion

1. Am I willing to do as I have been called to do, no matter how uncomfortable it might make me?
2. Am I willing to proclaim what Jesus means to my life? Do I throw the metaphorical confetti and cheer for him?
3. Am I willing to speak up among those who deny Jesus or who try to quiet down believers?
4. Do I have a deep concern for those who fail to recognize Jesus?
5. Have I removed those things that might be seen as an affront to God?

The Parable of the Vineyard

Golden Text: “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 3:21-24; NIV)

Key Thought: Acceptance of Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior is the only way to please God.

Lesson Text: Luke 20:1-19 (NIV)

¹ One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. ² “Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave you this authority?” ³ He replied, “I will also ask you a question. Tell me, ⁴ John’s baptism – was it from heaven, or from men?” ⁵ They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Why didn’t you believe him?’” ⁶ But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.” ⁷ So they answered, “We don’t know where it was from.” ⁸ Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” ⁹ He went on to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. ¹⁰ At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. ¹² He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. ¹³ “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’” ¹⁴ “But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. ‘This is the heir,’ they said. ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’” ¹⁵ So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. “What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When the people heard this, they said, “May this never be!” ¹⁷ Jesus looked directly at them and asked, “Then what is the meaning of that which is written: “‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone?’”

¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.” ¹⁹ The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

Life Need – Introduction

Our secular world is built on subjectivity: *Do what feels good. Take the easy way out. Do what comes naturally.* I’m sure other sayings can come to mind here that embody the same sentiment. God’s ordered plan for the creation and mankind has no subjectivity in it. God throughout generations and time has pointed man to Himself and to His chosen son. “Messiah” is the same as “anointed”, which is to be the chosen one. King David was anointed by Samuel to be king while yet a youth in Bethlehem. God had chosen him to become the king of Israel even though it was a fairly long period of time before he actually took the throne as king. In the meantime, though, David was still the “chosen one” to become king of Israel when the time was right. Jesus Christ is God’s “chosen One” and the agent of God’s chosen plan for the redemption of mankind. He is revealed and brought to the world when the time is right and God’s plan comes to fruition. Look at Isaiah 49 as the passage that gives us perfect understanding of God’s purpose.

Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. He said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor . . .” And now the LORD says – he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength – he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth”’ (v. 1-3, 5-6; NIV)

Israel is God’s chosen people and was given the law for them to follow. The promise of God is given first to Abraham, then to Isaac, and next to Jacob (who is also called Israel). Galatians 3:24 (NIV) shows that the law “was put in charge [KJV “became our schoolmaster”] to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith”. Israel becoming God’s chosen people and being given the law was not an end in itself, but had a purpose. It was to be the

mechanism whereby God could bring Messiah to the earth. He would be revealed at the right place and time in God’s purpose, as Isaiah prophesied. He is the polished arrow made perfectly for God to cast into the world at the right place and time. Jesus is the Messiah of God for the children of Israel, fulfilling God’s promise to them. Galatians 3:16 shows that even the promise given to Abraham is focused on Christ as Abraham’s seed and not on the entire nation of Israel. Being Abraham’s descendants was a point of pride for the Jews but Paul shows us that the promise is based on Christ and not on the Jews’ national identity.

Our generation and time has the same need as those people in the Old Testament as well as the people living when the events of Luke 20 occurred. All men in every time and place are judged by God according to the acceptance in their hearts of God’s plan and God’s son. In the OT they needed to look forward with anticipation for his first coming. When he was here on earth the people needed to receive him as Christ and Messiah, hearing with their hearts his voice and teaching. We now must “believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” to receive God’s plan of redemption for us.

Bible Learning

The text we are studying today has wonderful lessons to be drawn out. The rulers of the Temple and the elders are the first characters introduced in the story. The context of our section of scripture is the week before Passover. Jesus was about to be crucified. He came to the city of Jerusalem and the Temple on a daily basis that week, teaching the people and causing many to believe in him, as well as working miracles. Jerusalem is filled with pilgrims from everywhere in the known world who had come to be present for the feast. The rulers and elders are trying every way that they can to diminish Jesus in the eyes of the people and find a way to arrest or stone him. The people shouted “Hosanna” (which is “God save us”) as well as putting their coats and palm leaves (the symbol of the nation of Israel) on the road. They are making him king of Israel in their eyes and the rulers just can’t let this happen.

When Jesus taught the people in the Temple they challenged him with a question, hoping it will give them a reason to arrest him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” If he answered that God gave this power they would use that for an excuse to accuse him in front of the people – because nobody could claim to speak for God or be His son. They had reduced the service of God as His chosen people to a religious and secular organization nominally based on the Law of Moses. Their secular and religious positions gave them the power over the people in their city and in the country. The

strength of their power was based on the regulation and traditions which they forced people to follow, not on the true service of God. Literally they operated (as in our time also) from the position of “he who has all the gold makes all the rules”. They had the Temple offerings and tithes to be gathered as well as all the commercial franchises surrounding the Temple court and in the outer court. This is why Jesus in the previous chapter of Luke throws over the money tables and the seller’s booths and drives them from the Temple. They made the worship of the one true God into a commercial endeavor marked by the money-grubbing practices of the merchants serving the Temple trade and money exchanging. The Temple tax could only be paid with the right kind of coin and the exchange rates cheated the pilgrims coming there to worship.

Their challenge to Jesus is to ask by what “power” he did these things. By what “power” did he throw the tables over? By what “power” did he teach the people? The word “power” here is the Greek word *exousia* which is power released and used. This is not a potential power held in reserve for when the time is right, but the exercise of power. Their challenge of Jesus’ authority to do God’s will shows the hardness and wickedness of their hearts. They were the spiritual and religious leaders of their people and instead of seeing the goodness of God in the works and teachings of Christ they reject him, turning back to their own devices and sin. They should be the spiritual leaders and servants to the people but choose their wealth and position instead.

Jesus Christ answers their question with a question, putting the hardness of their hearts before all the people to see. His question is “the teachings of John the Baptist – from God or man?” What a wonderful way of answering their challenge, going right to the heart of the matter. What was John’s message? Let’s look at the book of Acts to help give us perspective on what John taught.

Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. As John was completing his work, he said: ‘Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’ “Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath (Acts 13:24-27; NIV)

John preaches repentance and baptism, the change of heart that God wants from all men. It is about the washing away of sin, and our rising up in the

newness of our relationship with God. His calling is to prepare the way of Jehovah before all Israel. The rulers and elders of that time reject the message of John but the people go and hear him and are convicted in their hearts. They repent, receiving the message that he brings. The ultimate message that John shows is that the one that comes after him will be the “chosen one” whom God brings to save people from their sins and give them redemption. Clearly the rulers and elders cannot agree with John’s message as it goes directly against them, nor can they say it is from man else the people reject and stone them. They give the courageous answer of “we don’t know”, which colors them with their own deceit.

Jesus then tells the parable of the vineyard. This parable parallels the section of Isaiah 5 where God makes Israel to be the most beautiful vineyard, given and planted with all that God can do for them. The leaders and people reject God, instead choosing idolatry which spoiled the wonderful role that God had given them. In the parable the caretakers of the vineyard reject the Master’s servants and then ultimately reject and kill His son bringing His judgment on them. But understand that the rejection of God’s Messiah was necessary for the ultimate plan of God to come to pass. Would God have brought all the promises to Israel to pass right at that time if the leaders and people had received Jesus as Christ and believed that he was Messiah? The prophets clearly show that God guides Christ to do all that He requires of him, but that the nation of Israel rejects him utterly and is destroyed for their rejection. By A.D. 139 the nation is destroyed and dispersed with no view to completion of the national promises to them until the Millennial kingdom of the future.

It is easy for us in this administration of grace to look on the children of Israel with scorn for their unbelief and national disgrace but it is also a picture of the whole secular world. The hardness of hearts shown in the parable is part of our world, too, as well as the unbelief in churches today.

Bible Application

After hearing the parable of the vineyard the people exclaim “May this never be”. It isn’t the picture they believe in, for the Messiah to be killed by the rulers and elders and the nation turned over to others. They have been singing “Hosanna to him who comes in the name of the Lord”. They have been hoping that Jesus will ascend to the Temple mount and sit on the throne of David as king. Some hope he will throw the Romans out of Israel and restore the kingdom. They don’t understand what’s going to happen; even the Apostles want to argue with him. Jesus then goes to Scripture and quotes a verse from Psalm 118 to show them who he is and then clarifies what will happen. “Jesus looked directly at them and asked, ‘Then what is

the meaning of that which is written: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone”? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed’ (Luke 20:17-18, NIV).

God had revealed to Jesus clearly from the law and prophets what his role in God’s plan was going to be. Jesus understood the ultimate ending of this story, but cannot completely share or explain it to the disciples and Apostles. He tells them what will happen but they all want to disagree with him. We can see Jesus’ heart in verses from the last chapter, where he cries over the city and the people who will be crushed by their rejection.

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.” (Luke 19:41-44; NIV)

We can so easily look backwards at the people of Israel and judge them for their hardness of hearts, their idolatrous practices, their rejection of God’s Christ. The vineyard in the parable will be given to “others” by the Master. Other people will take care of God’s creation and planting, and show Him the respect and love due to the Master who gives life and goodness to all. This is the ultimate meaning of the parable and the quotation from Psalms. Look at this section from 1 Peter chapter 2 for more clarification.

As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” . . . But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (v. 4-6, 9-10)

God has called us to be the “others” that will take care of the vineyard. The word “others” here refers to *other of the same type*. God’s chosen people in the OT were the children of Israel. Who will be the other chosen people of God? Those of the children of Israel which put their hearts and hope in the coming of Messiah will be part of God’s restoration in the future. The “others” are those that will be living stones built into the dwelling of God with Jesus Christ as the head of the corner, the keystone of the whole edifice. The church of the body of Christ today is composed of both Jew and Gentile, all set within the body as it has pleased our God. Our opportunity today is the same as Abraham’s; to believe the Word of God as He has given it to us by faithful witnesses. Jesus says to the scribes that they look in the scripture to find eternal life and that they will find that it all testifies of him. He truly is the central figure of all of God’s Word and plan for the creation.

Life Response

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10; NIV)

What does it mean for us to be God’s people in this day and time? God through Christ gives us the opportunity to be part of His wonderful family and fellowship. We have received a newness of life, being baptized and set apart, with the power of the Holy Spirit cleansing us from the inside. We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ to be a new people. We have been bought by God with this most precious sacrifice to become part of the family of Jehovah. Our position is to be those that take care of the vineyard and do all in our lives to the glory of Him who has chosen us.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is the heart of man so important to God?
2. How do we keep the influence of the world from drawing us away from God’s truth?
3. Why didn’t Jesus answer the religious leaders’ question?
4. How does Jesus cut right to the heart of the religious leaders?
5. What does it mean to be God’s people for our generation?

Trick Questions

Lesson Text: Luke 20:20-44 (NRSV, interspersed through lesson)

Why is it that I'm suspicious of most questions?

My suspicion about questions began in high school. The final test of my first semester in Physics consisted of a variety of questions: true-or-false, multiple choice, a long series of matching questions, and an essay at the end. It soon appeared that the lettered answers for the matching spelled out an acrostic. It didn't take long for us to figure out the answer: "MERRY CHRISTMAS". But as students read each question more closely, several were strangely worded. The answer did *not* spell out a happy greeting for the upcoming holiday. What a confused mess. So did we pass or fail?

Trick questions.

Since that fateful day in Physics, I've decided that *trick* is available in every *question*.

A quick look at today's lesson text convinces me that trickery also abounded in our Lord's day. Jealous religious leaders in Jewry badgered him with queries designed to trip him up, using his exact words. The religious professionals, who "knew the answers," used their questions trying to tie up Jesus on life's two issues: death and taxes. Then the Lord hamstrung them with a question of his own, one that they never answered.

Actually these guys were undercover agents for the authorities. Today's modern spy agencies operate under similar guidelines. Those first-century agents pretended to be bothered by genuine and disturbing religious problems as they squirmed under the grinding thumb of a foreign power. Surely the Lord would understand such a pure and honest query, right?

The Question about Paying Taxes (Luke 20:20-26)

²⁰ So they watched him and sent spies who pretended to be honest, in order to trap him by what he said, so as to hand him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the governor. ²¹ So they asked him, "Teacher, we know that you are right in what you say and teach, and you show deference to no one, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. ²² Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" ²³ But he perceived their craftiness and said to them, ²⁴ "Show me a denarius. Whose head and whose title does it bear?" They said, "The emperor's." ²⁵ He said to them, "Then give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." ²⁶ And they were not able in the presence of the people to trap him by what he said; and being amazed by his answer, they became silent.

Sales Tax, Income Tax, Luxury Tax, Death Tax, Property Tax: When Will It Stop?

There is nothing more odious than TAXES. Monies conscripted from law-abiding citizens to be used for the common good (and for the despotic rule of a foreign power), protecting against lawbreakers and foreign armies is used for every other conceivable idea dreamed up by lobbies. Americans of all stripes question the demand to pay taxes. After all, if I am a pacifist why should I be forced to obey a tax that funds an army that kills other humans? Why should my tax dollars benefit some “study” of an ant that doesn’t affect me and has little or no impact on anyone? Well, maybe there’s another question we should ask:

Who Wants the Tax, and Why?

“Look at the money and the artwork on it, and from where does it come?” That’s the question of Jesus. What does the answer tell you? Now the piece of money Jesus was shown didn’t amount to a lot of loot, but it was a spiritual question that disturbed the ruling class so much that it was willing to die in resistance. Only God rules His people. We shouldn’t become subservient to the evil empire by paying its taxes, they reasoned.

In essence, then, Jesus is saying we must give the government its due, and for good reason. A person who enjoys all the rights and privileges of the state cannot divorce himself from the support of the same. Christians are to be the most conscientious citizens of that state. Christians do their part in the government of the state. If they refuse to take on that responsibility and allow the amoral or materialistic to govern, Christians nullify their complaint about what is done or not done.

What about God’s Demands?

Jesus isn’t done. He isn’t just adding the part about God as an afterthought. Who we are has everything to do with God, whether we recognize it or not. God has the last word on life’s process, not the state. The voice of the conscience is louder than the voice of any man-made laws. A Christian is both a servant and a conscience of the state. “Just because he is the best of citizens, he will refuse to do what a Christian citizen cannot do. He will at one and the same time fear God and honor the king” (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, Westminster Press, ©1975, p. 249).

What About Death?

Now that we’ve got the taxes problem fixed, how does Jesus handle the question of death? Maybe it’s another question, one of the afterlife. Which

is it? Well, maybe it's both, but read the question and then we will get its background.

The Question about the Resurrection (Luke 20:27-33)

²⁷ Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him ²⁸ and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; ³⁰ then the second ³¹ and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. ³² Finally the woman also died. ³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her."

The Sadducees Are Conflicted

Their supposed conflict with the rule requiring a man to marry the childless widow of his dead brother to raise up children to his name (see Deut. 25:5-10) probably wasn't operative in their day, but such an absurdity couldn't work since seven brothers married her. So whose wife shall she be in the resurrection?

On top of that, this Levirate problem was just one of many conflicts the Sadducees had with the Pharisees. Most of the priests and scribes were Sadducees who accepted only the Torah, collaborated with Rome, were very rich, and would not endanger their place for anything. But the Pharisees held to the Scriptures and the ceremonial law but had no political ambitions as long as Rome left them to compound their laws. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection, angels, and spirits. The Sadducees denied all three, and they especially found no evidence for resurrection in any of the law. Pharisees believed in fate; life was planned and ordered by God. Sadducees believed in unlimited free will. Pharisees hoped for the coming of the Messiah, but Sadducees didn't want a Messiah to disturb their orderly lives.

Does any of that touch a nerve? Thankfully, our lives are not so conflicted.

Well now, how does Jesus take care of the Levirate problem? What does he say about life, death, resurrection, and life in the age to come?

Life in the Age to Come (Luke 20:34-38)

³⁴ Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; ³⁵ but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. ³⁶ Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. ³⁷ And the fact

that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. ³⁸ Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.”

What Jesus did/did not say

In this age there is marriage, but in that age of the resurrection there is no marriage. What then about our loved ones of this age? Jesus means what he says. Today love is expressed in marriage. In that day love is centered on God, like what we know of angels and the children of God.

Today death is real. In that age death is gone, like angels who aren't mortal. Resurrection means we express child-like faith and love. He doesn't say we will be angels; he says we will be like angels who are unaffected by death.

Jesus points to Moses at the scene of the burning bush where God declares that He is the God of the patriarchs, proving that the Torah does speak of the resurrection of the dead. God doesn't preside over the dead. He is the God of the living, proving that there is resurrection. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob “to him . . . are alive.”

Jesus is not saying that death is an illusion or an open door to a better place. The dead do sleep, and they will be resurrected. Jesus demonstrated both truths in the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11).

God created time and space for human life today, but He lives beyond such boundaries. Paul reveals this God in his sermon to Athenian philosophers in his day (see Acts 17:16-34). In His presence life is limitless. In the age to come resurrection life is endless. That's how He understands life with the likes of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Witness from the Commentaries

It is common for those who design to undermine any truth of God, to load it with difficulties. But we wrong ourselves, and wrong the truth of Christ, when we form our notions of the world of spirits by this world of sense. There are more worlds than one; a present visible world, and a future unseen world; and let every one compare this world and that world, and give the preference in his thoughts and cares to that which deserves them. Believers shall obtain the resurrection from the dead, that is the blessed resurrection. What shall be the happy state of the inhabitants of that world, we cannot express or conceive (*Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*).

He is not a God of the dead, or, there is no God of the dead – That is, the term God implies such a relation, as cannot possibly subsist between him and the dead; who in the Sadducees’ sense are extinguished spirits; who could neither worship him, nor receive good from him. So that all live to him – All who have him for their God, live to and enjoy him. This sentence is not an argument for what went before; but the proposition which was to be proved. And the consequence is apparently just. For as all the faithful are the children of Abraham, and the Divine promise of being a God to him and his seed is entailed upon them, it implies their continued existence and happiness in a future state as much as Abraham’s. And as the body is an essential part of man, it implies both his resurrection and theirs; and so overthrows the entire scheme of the Sadducean doctrine” (Wesley’s Notes).

To God, no human being is dead, or ever will be; but all sustain an abiding conscious relation to Him. But the “all” here meant “those who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world.” These sustain a gracious covenant relation to God, which cannot be dissolved. In this sense our Lord affirms that for Moses to call the Lord the “God” of His patriarchal servants if at that moment they had no existence, would be unworthy of Him. He “would be ashamed to be called their God, if He had not prepared for them a city” (Heb 11:16). How precious are these glimpses of the resurrection state!” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary).

Jesus . . . simply points out . . . the difference between life in this age and the age to come. In this age, the fact of death makes marriage and perpetuation of life essential. However, in the age to come there is no death, but those who attain to the resurrection are equal to the angels, they are children of God. Notice how far this is from the notion of the immortal soul, an idea that has intruded itself into Christian doctrine. Immortality is based on a doctrine of human nature that denies death; resurrection is based on a doctrine of God which says that even though we die, God gives life to the dead (Fred B. Craddock, *Luke, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, © John Knox Press 1990, p. 238).

Trick Questions Put to Rest, and the Question about David's Son (Luke 20:39-44)

³⁹ Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well."
⁴⁰ For they no longer dared to ask him another question.

⁴¹ Then he said to them, "How can they say that the Messiah is David's son? ⁴² For David himself says in the book of Psalms, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, ⁴³ until I make your enemies your footstool.'" "

⁴⁴ David thus calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?"

Why the Dilemma?

Why did Jesus raise this question? Was it merely a dig at his questioners, attempting to frustrate them, getting in the last word? What should we learn from his reference to Psalm 110, the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament?

Of course Jesus is the son of David. Of course Jesus is David's Lord. Luke uses this question to note that no single title or descriptive term can be the sole normative designation for Jesus. Jesus is David's son, but not that by itself. He is David's Lord, but not that alone. Luke also notes that Jesus was also Elijah-like and Jonah-like. Perhaps Luke is urging us to not build a Christology around a single title or designation. Too often Bible students use such special labels to thus identify others as heretics.

Questions for Us

1. What trick questions have boggled your mind? How do you handle them?
2. What similarities and differences do you recognize about death and taxes?
3. How would you outline the conflicts of the Pharisees and Sadducees in one sentence?
4. Why did the Sadducees raise the question regarding the Levirate Law?
5. What are the contrasts between life in this age and life in the age to come?
6. What do you think of the statement that God sees the patriarchs as living? How do you understand that in light of the doctrine about the sleep of the dead?
7. What did Jesus say and not say about death and resurrection?
8. Which witness from the commentaries helped you most?
9. Why did Jesus raise his own dilemma question?
10. How does this lesson help you understand life today and life in the age to come?

The Last Supper

Have you ever tried to imagine how Jesus thought? It can be hard to imagine how anyone else thinks, really, but Jesus provides a special case which presents big barriers to our imaginations. He was born in a much different time and culture than us. There are large chunks of his life about which we have no description, and other chunks we have heard about so often that it can be hard to see them in a “fresh” way. And Jesus was also the one sinless person in history. That on its own seems to put his mind far from our minds. It is hard to get into his head. But we should not lose track of the fact that Jesus thought through his actions. It can be hard for us to picture Jesus as choosing what he did, but he did. He didn’t just travel around the countryside of Israel doing what God told him to do, like a robot.

Jesus was open to surrendering his own comfort. He formed close friendships. He liked parties. He told good stories. He argued well. He saw a lot of suffering and helped a lot of sufferers. He got angry. He got sad. He was tempted, like us, and suffered in his temptation. And he always chose well when tempted. Jesus made choices of his own, and followed through on desires of his own – it just happens that a large part of what he chose was to align himself with God’s desires and let them be his own.

In today’s text we learn some things about Jesus’ thoughts. We can see some of not just what he knew would happen, but how he felt about it.

Lesson Text: Luke 22:1-23 (NRSV)

Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. ²The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people.

³Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; ⁴he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. ⁵They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. ⁶So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.

⁷Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.” ⁹They asked him, “Where do you want us to make preparations for it?” ¹⁰“Listen,” he said to them, “when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters ¹¹and say to the owner of the house,

‘The teacher asks you, “Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?”’¹² He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.”¹³ So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁴ When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him.¹⁵ He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;¹⁶ for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”¹⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves;¹⁸ for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

¹⁹ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”²⁰ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.²¹ But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table.²² For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!”²³ Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

Bible Learning

We could say that in some ways Jesus was having a rare night “off”, eating a meal with just his disciples. Jesus was not at a wealthy man’s house being shown off to other guests. He wasn’t being questioned by his enemies. And he wasn’t surrounded by the sick and troubled of the area keeping him from his meal. Perhaps few knew where he was at all, in one house out of many in Jerusalem. Peter and John prepare the meal and then Jesus and the twelve Apostles gather to eat together.

Some have suggested that Jesus fasted that evening. They bring up his comments in the passage about the cup being divided “among yourselves” and his no longer sharing in it, and the bread being “given for you”. It is an interesting thought of Jesus bypassing the celebration, perhaps to pray for the people he was about to die for. That would make Jesus’ “eager desire” to eat with them an unfulfilled desire. But I favor the belief that Jesus joined in the meal, and that his comments emphasized how long a delay there would be before his *next* eating of the meal with them.

Jesus spoke at the table about the meal being “fulfilled in the kingdom of God”. This is one of many cases when the New Testament draws an application from the Old Testament which we wouldn’t be able to recognize on our own.

Passover was the annual celebration of God’s mercy and power and the Hebrew’s freedom from slavery in Egypt. Nothing in the Old Testament

seems to present this as an event needing to be fulfilled. It centered on the death of a lamb, recalling the original Passover lambs. They were killed and their blood was put around the doorways of the Hebrew homes in Egypt, to save the lives of their firstborn sons. (Ironic, God; we get it.) Then each lamb was cooked and all of the meat was to be eaten by morning – it was demanded that everyone share in the meal together and remain in the house together until morning. After that first Passover everyone set out to follow God, with God’s prophet Moses.

I think it is easier to see Passover as an analogy to the Church than as related to the kingdom. But Jesus knew what he was talking about. We could also recall Passover as coming after a series of plagues through which God showed judgment, and which demonstrated God’s care for His own people. A leader who opposed God was publicly punished. Those who served God were at last freed from their captivity as had been predicted, and they set out to become a nation. It has been suggested that the meal’s future fulfillment relates to the wedding supper celebration in the kingdom.

Bible Application

I think that most of us read this passage knowing what comes next. I can’t remember what I thought of this the first time I heard it or read it. I may have been exposed to this text more than a hundred times. But there is still interest and power here.

If I read this in the right mood I can still get a shiver from the idea of Judas’ betrayal, or even mourn for his foolishness. I can be struck again by the shortsightedness of leaders who were concerned about public opinion only for their initial action of removing a man, and were unconcerned about any aftermath. I can be struck by the thought that God made at least some things *easier* for Jesus, preparing the room much as with the colt a few days earlier. Jesus had enough on his mind – particularly if he already knew what Judas was up to. I can ponder the idea of the bread and cup as Jesus’ body and blood, and what that means for my responsibilities and my relationships with other believers.

I am struck by Jesus’ *eagerness* for that evening. Was this the last thing he looked forward to in that week? Would the promise of peaceful companionship be enough to make him eager for it? I think he looked forward to finally opening up to the disciples about his situation. He had sprinkled comments about his fate through the previous weeks, which were not well understood or accepted. Perhaps the absence of Judas after a certain point in the evening made this time special (though Luke does not mention Judas’ exit; John 13:30). John tells us that the disciples perceived Jesus as speaking more plainly that evening than he normally did (16:29).

It seems unlikely that when Jesus had chosen Judas he was already aware of Judas' fate. But somewhere along the way things became known to him. That must have hurt. I suspect that when Jesus spoke verse 22 it was in the tone of grief, wishing that he could save Judas but knowing it was not possible. Of course Judas was not really alone in betrayal, he just chose it more cold bloodedly than the others. He walked away; they ran. But they also returned to Jesus' service.

Jesus knew what was coming for them and he didn't chide them for their weakness. He tried to build them up and prepare them. Symbolically he offered them his own life, the day before he offered it literally. Of course in a different sense Jesus had already been offering them his life for years. He gave them his thoughts, his time, his love, his patience. That last night was very much in character for him.

If you or I were about to be executed for someone else's crimes what kind of last supper do you think would take place? Perhaps, holding Jesus' example clearly in mind it could be something like this one, in an effort to act like him. But left to our own devices I think we would not act anything like Jesus did. We just would not think like him, if we didn't already have his mind in ours. We might wallow in self-pity, or rage at injustice, or sit in depression not even able to eat. Of course it probably makes a huge difference when you know, like he knew, that unjust as that death is it does not come by chance but fulfills the purposes of God.

Life Response

We can't use this text to say that we never can object to poor treatment. There are examples in the Bible of confronting and seeking to correct wrongs, and Jesus is a special case. And even though Jesus kept in mind that what really mattered was God's will he also addressed his own unhappiness about events, in prayer. We are called to live like Jesus, but our situation is not really the same as his. But while we may be less certain than him about when our discomfort serves God's will, it makes sense for us to consider that possibility before we abandon a situation. We should even consider that possibility before we complain about a situation (Phil. 2:14). Jesus showed us such a high standard for conduct we can spend our whole lives working through how to live up to what he has already done. Don't set your sights low. Remember not to beat yourself up about your weakness, either.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you think it is easier to choose God's desires as your own if you have never yet sinned than it is if you have sinned for years?

2. Have you ever tried to serve God like a robot, just trying to unquestioningly do things you figured God wanted? How did that work for you?
3. At what point do you think Jesus knew that Judas would betray him? Do you think that God revealed that to Jesus, or that Jesus recognized a change in Judas' attitude? Which would be more painful to Jesus?
4. How much of a restriction do you think it put on Jesus to have Judas present when he would speak to his disciples about what he expected from them, and his love for them?
5. How do you see Jesus' actions in this passage in terms of the instruction to "do everything without complaining or arguing" (Phil. 2:14)?

Listed below is a set of readings to use in preparation for next week's lesson:

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: Luke 22:24-28

Tuesday: Luke 22:29-32

Wednesday: Luke 22:33-38

Thursday: Luke 22:39-42

Friday: Luke 22:43-46

Saturday: Isaiah 53:1-12

Jesus' Last Night with His Disciples

Key Thought: To know and understand that according to Jesus being the greatest is not as important as being like the servant.

Lesson Text: Luke 22:24-46 (NASB)

²⁴ And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be greatest. ²⁵ And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' ²⁶ But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? But I am among you as the one who serves.

²⁸ "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; ²⁹ and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you ³⁰ that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

³¹ "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; ³² but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." ³³ But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" ³⁴ And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."

³⁵ And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing." ³⁶ And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. ³⁷ For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has *its* fulfillment." ³⁸ They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough."

³⁹ And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. ⁴⁰ When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." ⁴¹ And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and *began* to pray, ⁴² saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." ⁴³ Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. ⁴⁴ And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the

ground. ⁴⁵ When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, ⁴⁶ and said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation.”

Introduction

Our society seems to put a great deal of importance on titles and recognition. How many times have you seen a name like Dr. Fred Smith or Fred Smith Ph.D? You might see a title like Fred Smith, Coordinator, or Fred Smith, President, or Pastor Fred Smith. I am using the name Fred Smith fictitiously but I think you get my point. Please, do not misunderstand me. Many people work very hard to earn their degrees and they have every right to be proud of their degree and their accomplishments. However, I am sure we all know many people who cannot put their name on any type of correspondence without adding their official title to their name.

Often the addition of a title to someone’s name may be to remind us of their specific qualification. However, I do believe that for many this is done out of vanity and pride. “Look at me, I am important.”

In today’s lesson Jesus reminds us that those who think they are the greatest really are not. We are to be like the servant who Jesus clearly tells us is the greatest of them all.

Jesus also tells his disciples there is a good reason that they need to be like the servant. There is a lesson for us in that as well.

Finally, we will take a look at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he was crucified. Ask yourself, was his death necessary? Would you be willing to sacrifice your only begotten child for the world?

Bible Learning

In Luke 22:24-30 we see a little dissension among the disciples as they argued over who was greatest. It is human nature that we all want to be or feel important, don’t we? The same could be said for the disciples. Jesus knew about their disagreement and explained to them something that society today just cannot understand: that whoever wants to be first shall be last. Whoever wants to be in charge or the leader should become like a young new believer and be more like the servant than the leader. Do we have that problem today in the church? Do we have people who believe all their years on the board make them the leader? Have you ever heard or felt like there is someone who believes that the church is really their property and that nothing can be done without his/her permission? So many times in a church you have the same people doing everything. Sometimes this might be necessary. However I do believe there are times that the “wanna be” attitude might really be stifling a member who has much to give in service to Father

God, His Son Jesus and your church. Finally in Luke 22:30 Jesus is giving his disciples some insight on their future and just how really important they will be in God's coming Kingdom. They will be on a throne judging the twelve tribes of Israel. This is in a time yet to come; a time we very much long for.

In Luke 22:31-38 we see Jesus giving Simon a warning. Jesus told Simon that Satan himself has asked Jesus for permission to sift Simon like the wheat. Satan wants to try to sift the wheat from the chaff. Jesus has prayed for Simon to have the strength to endure what Simon is about to experience in the immediate future of the arrest and death of Jesus. Simon in typical fashion speaks right up: "Lord I will go to prison or even die for you" (v. 33). But Jesus tells Peter that before the night is over Peter will deny Jesus three times. Have you ever denied Jesus Christ? Maybe you have not denied him aloud as plainly as we know Peter did, however there might be times we do deny Jesus. Have we obeyed his command to go into all the world and preach the gospel? Have we denied Jesus in our silence? Do your co-workers know that you are a Christian? Do they know you are active in your church? Do you deny Jesus in a more subtle way? Do we read and study our Bibles daily? After we get home today will our Bible be set in its special spot not to be touched again until next Sunday? These are all ways that we can deny Jesus Christ.

We might be confused by Luke 22:38 because it seems like Jesus told his disciples to carry the two swords that are mentioned. We all know that Jesus did not advocate violence so at first glance the two swords do not fit with Jesus and his teachings. Perhaps this is Jesus using symbolism once again? Could it be an attempt to warn his disciples that they will face violence as they proclaim his teachings and as they do the work that Jesus was training them to do? In Luke 22:37 Jesus had just reminded the disciples of what was written in Isaiah 53:12 by the prophet Isaiah. They all were to be considered among the criminals of that day.

In Luke 22:39-46 we read about Jesus and his disciples as they finished their time together eating. They went to the Mount of Olives and to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus instructed the disciples to pray that they can overcome the temptation he knows is about to befall them. Jesus removes himself about a stone's throw away, far enough to have the privacy he needed. Perhaps he chose that distance for his comfort and their comfort, so they could all still see each other. In Luke 22:42 Jesus prays to Father God and asks God if He was willing to keep Jesus from having to go through what he knows lies ahead. However, as the perfect, obedient son Jesus says *not my will Lord but yours be done*. In other words, *I may not like what is about to happen but if that is what you want done then I will obey*. In

Luke 22:43 the physician records that God sent an angel from heaven to strengthen and comfort Jesus. His agony and stress was so great that his sweat became like great drops of blood. The physician Luke is the only gospel writer to mention this; probably it was because of his former profession. According to christiananswers.net the clinical term for this is *hematohidrosis*. I urge you to go home and look this up. The human body can actually sweat blood during times of great distress. We know from Luke 22:45-46 that Jesus got up after his praying and found his followers asleep. Jesus reminds them that they need to get up and pray that they may not enter into temptation. Are we alert and praying or are we unaware and sleeping?

Life Response

As we go through our everyday lives are we willing to be where God has directed us to be? Are we willing to live with the understanding that the first shall be last? Do we understand that it doesn't matter if we have a fancy title or a degree because we can all be effective servants for God and His Son Jesus Christ? In God's coming Kingdom will it matter if you ever were someone special in your own eyes? Do we realize that God does not care about your position or importance in society today? As you write your name and add "Coordinator" and "Dr.", do you do it out of vanity and self pride? If so, do you feel you are honoring God or honoring yourself?

As we take a look at the death of Jesus Christ do we really understand all that he endured for you and for me? Think about the death of Jesus Christ and all that was recorded that he went through. Do you live your life in such a way that you are willing to be a servant of Jesus or do you live your life like you really do not care about all that Jesus suffered for you and for all of mankind?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you suffer with the "look at me" attitude? Is it important to you to add that special title at the end of your name? Do you realize that we are all the same in the eyes of God?
2. Do you know of someone in your church who believes that he/she is the owner? If so, how do you lovingly explain to this person that it is God's house, not theirs?
3. Do you read and study your Bible daily? If Satan asks God to sift you out like wheat how well do you think you will do? How strong and how ready are you when times really get bad?

(continued on page 42)

The Trials of Jesus

Golden Text: “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2)

Key Thought: “You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him.” (Luke 23:14)

Lesson Text: Luke 22:54, 63–23:25 (NASB)

⁵⁴ Having arrested Him, they led Him away and brought Him to the house of the high priest

⁶³ Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him and beating Him, ⁶⁴ and they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, “Prophecy, who is the one who hit You?” ⁶⁵ And they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming.

⁶⁶ When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying, ⁶⁷ “If You are the Christ, tell us.” But He said to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe; ⁶⁸ and if I ask a question, you will not answer. ⁶⁹ But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE power OF GOD.” ⁷⁰ And they all said, “Are You the Son of God, then?” And He said to them, “Yes, I am.” ⁷¹ Then they said, “What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth.”

^{23:1} Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate. ² And they began to accuse Him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.” ³ So Pilate asked Him, saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And He answered him and said, “It is as you say.” ⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.” ⁵ But they kept on insisting, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place.”

⁶ When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷ And when he learned that He belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time.

⁸ Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was

hoping to see some sign performed by Him.⁹ And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing.¹⁰ And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently.¹¹ And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate.¹² Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other.

¹³ Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people,¹⁴ and said to them, “You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him.¹⁵ No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him.¹⁶ Therefore I will punish Him and release Him.”¹⁷ [Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner.]

¹⁸ But they cried out all together, saying, “Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!”¹⁹ (He was one who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection made in the city, and for murder.)²⁰ Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again,²¹ but they kept on calling out, saying, “Crucify, crucify Him!”²² And he said to them the third time, “Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; therefore I will punish Him and release Him.”²³ But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail.²⁴ And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted.²⁵ And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.

Introduction

From a human point of view what happened to Jesus to cause his suffering and death is not only illegal but inhuman, cruel, and merciless. But from a heavenly point of view it was demanded for the payment of sin. Redemption from sin, in the sight of Yahweh God, the holy God of human life, requires the giving up of life-giving blood from a sinless sacrifice. We object and recoil in horror at the mistreatment Jesus endured during his trials. But this was God’s plan. If it were not for the passion and sacrifice of Jesus, all humankind would pay for their own sins by death at the final judgment in the lake of fire. But thanks to Jesus’ willingness to endure this great suffering, to relinquish his blood in tortuous blows, we can escape both the blood-letting ordeal and the fiery trial and punishment. That is the gift Jesus has wrought for us by enduring the passion Yahweh laid before him. He endured it all that he might gain a far greater crown of life and glory. We must ask ourselves, to what degree of suffering are we willing to

yield in order to do what God calls upon us to do in this life and gain a great reward?

Bible Learning

Our text is outlined in a series of trials and sufferings endured by Jesus during the last hours of his life. One such calamity was added upon by another in succession. All the while Jesus was being grilled with questions to trick him into making confessions that would condemn him. What Jesus endured during these hours of torture may not be unique in the annals of human history. Many men and women have undergone similar, even more excruciatingly painful tests, and the accounts of man's inhumanity to man are countless. But none have done it for a purpose imposed by his God to provide a way to save all mankind from certain and absolute annihilation.

In our lesson text we learn about the early trials Jesus faced during his passion. Next week the lesson reveals the actual suffering, dying, and death of Jesus on his cross. They are all part of the entirety of God's plan to pay for the sins of humankind.

Jesus' passion began in the garden of Gethsemane, before his arrest. He prayed for his heavenly Father to remove this anticipated torturous ordeal from him. He knew what it would involve and he sought passionately for another way for God's plan to be achieved. "He knelt down and began to pray, saying, 'Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not my will, but Yours be done' . . . being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:41b-42, 44). This was an emotional anticipatory agony, but it set the tone for what was to come.

At his arrest all his disciples deserted him. Two men, Judas and Peter, tried to address their guilt. At one point Jesus' and Peter's eyes met. "The Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61). Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (v. 62). Jesus, too, must have cringed internally.

Upon being taken into custody the temple soldiers took liberties to mistreat Jesus. "They were mocking Him and beating Him" (v. 63). Their words were cruel and heartless and derided his prophetic ministry (v. 64-65). Everything Jesus stood for was fodder for their battery of insults.

Next, just past midnight, Jesus was led into the chambers of the chief priests to face a "trial" before them, their scribes, and the council of elders (commonly called the Sanhedrin). They badgered him with questions. They further wearied his spirit, but their intensity paid off. By their incessant inquiries they gained valuable bits of information to use against him. At one point he made a confession that provided substantially damning testimony they would use repeatedly against him before Pilate and Herod. Jesus

admitted, “‘From now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.’ And they all said, ‘Are you the Son of God, them?’ And he said to them, ‘Yes, I am’” (v. 69-70). With this confession they believed they had gathered sufficient evidence to condemn Jesus to death. “They said, ‘What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth’” (v. 71). Jesus spoke only the truth but he knew that what he said would ultimately condemn him. He braced himself for the human wrath to come.

Jesus would face three more trials. Two were before Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, which included Jerusalem. One was with Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, where Jesus spent much time teaching and preaching. Herod Antipas was one of three sons of Herod the Great who built the last majestic temple in Jerusalem.

First Trial before Pilate

This whole episode reads like a well-tuned detective or mystery novel, with lots of intrigue and unexpected twists and turns. “The whole body” (23:1) of Jewish leaders went in force, got Pilate out of bed, and began viciously accusing Jesus of many crimes, before Pilate could get fully dressed or get the sleep out of his eyes. To Pilate these Jews were already insufferable misfits. This uninvited intrusion into his privacy irritated him. Jesus, once again, had to endure their venomous accusations which further wearied his already exhausted soul. One remark in particular caught Pilate’s attention, “We found this man . . . saying that He Himself is Christ, a King” (v. 2). To which Pilate inquired, “Are you the king of the Jews?” (v. 3). Jesus mustered up strength to say boldly the truth, “It is as you say” (v. 3), and he left Pilate’s response in the hands of his Father. Jesus himself did not feel like a king at this moment. The long night, the beatings by the soldiers, the unending questions brought him low. He no longer had the strength to answer his harassing accusers. But one remark he did permit himself. To Pilate he said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm” (John 18:37). Pilate was satisfied that this was not a secular issue, but a religious one. He wanted no part of it. He pronounced his judgment before them, “I find no guilt in this man” (Luke 23:4).

Unfortunately, this would not put an end to the matter. But the Jewish rulers were about to give Pilate an out, though it would mean more rough treatment for Jesus. The Jews protested, “He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place” (v. 5). *Ahah!* Pilate thought to himself, and then asked if Jesus was a Galilean. When he

learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time (v. 6). And thus would start the second early-morning trial.

Trial before Herod

Herod was pleased to have the opportunity to see Jesus. He wanted to see Jesus perform a miracle, but Jesus was not obliging. Herod soured because Jesus refused to respond to any of his multitude of questions. Of course "the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing [Jesus] vehemently" (v. 10). Herod found this meeting dull and wasteful. He ordered his soldiers to brutally mistreat Jesus with contempt and mocking (v. 11). This no doubt met with the same kind of treatment given to Jesus earlier by the temple guards. By this time Jesus was severely physically weakened. His legs felt unresponsive to his need to stand or walk. Herod tired of this game and sent Jesus back to Pilate in humiliation. And thus begins the final trial.

Second Trial before Pilate

Pilate's first words were to acquit Jesus. He made clear that neither he nor Herod had found any guilt in Jesus regarding the charges brought against him (v. 13-15). But the Jewish rulers would not let the matter rest. They cried out mercilessly for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate's next move is strange. He offers to free Jesus owing to a certain Passover custom, but they adamantly reject his offer. Insolently they cry out for Barabbas, a murderer, robber, and insurrectionist. This crowd will not be appeased until they have the blood of Jesus. Pilate tries one last time to free Jesus by asking, "What evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; therefore I will punish him and release Him" (v. 22). What he did was have Jesus scourged, brutally whipped (John 19:1). Some consolation!

In all this activity Jesus remains true to his God's will for him. Pilate's repeated declarations that in his eyes Jesus has done no wrong pinpoints the very fact Yahweh wants revealed – Jesus is the perfect man to be His sacrifice for sin. And the silence of Jesus throughout the night demonstrates the willingness of the sacrifice to go to the slaughter like a lamb without blemish (Isa. 53:7). The heartless abuse Jesus endured was emblematic of all the sins of the world.

Bible Application

Nothing better can be said about the lesson of Jesus' example during his passion than is written in Hebrews 12:1-4:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.

Life Response

The communion service has the purpose to put us in remembrance of Jesus dying for our sins. But it is well for us to further remember that there was much physical, emotional, and psychological suffering also associated with his passion. Not many of us will have to endure torture leading to death, but we all have suffered physical, emotional, and psychological duress. How we face such situations says a lot about our internal character. That is why we are told that God considers such moments to be His discipline for our lives (Heb. 12:5-6). We can complain about those moments and seek out help from others to relieve the distress, but in the end, as children of Almighty Yahweh God we must find the strength and rely on His help to see us through the trials. God is honored when we endure well and build the kind of character within us that is pleasing to Him. It helps to keep our eyes focused on the glory that awaits those who are conquerors over the trials of this life. We have a much greater life to enjoy in the future if we do.

Truths to Emphasize

1. Yahweh ordained the need for Jesus to suffer and die.
2. Jesus willingly obeyed his Father's will.
3. Jesus suffered abuse to make the payment for the sins of the world.
4. We must be willing to accept similar abuse for the sake of Yahweh's honor and the good news message.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

Key Thought: “Save yourself!” Or “save *us*”? Jesus, even in his last day and his last hour, had the choice of saving himself or saving all of us who would believe according to the Father’s will.

Lesson Text: Luke 23:26-56 (NASB)

²⁶ When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus.

²⁷ And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him. ²⁸ But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ “For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ ³⁰ “Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, ‘FALL ON US,’ AND TO THE HILLS, ‘COVER US.’ ³¹ “For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

³² Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him.

³³ When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. ³⁴ But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

³⁵ And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, “He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.” ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, “If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!” ³⁸ Now there was also an inscription above Him, “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” ⁴⁰ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ “And we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” ⁴³ And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, “Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.” Having said this, He breathed His last. ⁴⁷ Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he *began* praising God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent.” ⁴⁸ And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, *began* to return, beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things.

⁵⁰ And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man ⁵¹ (he had not consented to their plan and action), *a man* from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; ⁵² this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. ⁵⁴ It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. ⁵⁵ Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Introduction

Jesus appears before the High Priest and the “mob” at night in an illegitimate gathering. The High Priest says in the darkness, “Tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63). During that time, Peter denies him three times. Then, the rooster crows as morning approaches. Shortly afterward Jesus is taken to Pilate. Three times Pilate says “I find no fault in Him.” There was nothing worthy of capital punishment, which the Jews could not legally carry out themselves under the *Pax Romana*, the peace of Rome. Two of the saddest statements ever are where the chief priests cried out “We have no King but Caesar!” (John 19:15) and the crowd of Jews said “Let his blood be on us and our children” (Matt. 27:25). Think about that for a moment! Of all who were waiting for the longed Messiah, King of Israel, the chief priest says, “We have no king but Caesar” the pagan emperor? Were they not traitors of God’s plan through the Messiah, the King? And the people who should have longed for the LORD’s salvation, calling for innocent blood to be shed, and the guilt of that blood to be upon their children? Can one call curses upon oneself? It seems to be the case.

23:26-32 Simon, Daughters of Jerusalem, and Two Criminals

It is interesting that one of the Passover pilgrims from Africa (Cyrene is in North Africa), is forced to help Jesus. It is also interesting that one of the first directions of Jesus and the Spirit is for Philip to approach the Ethiopian eunuch dignitary, to take the message to Africa. That preaches well in our African churches!

The “Daughters of Jerusalem,” mourning as the Messiah is rejected, have more to worry about in what will surely come, “not one stone will be left on another,” than just crying over the travesty of Jesus’ death. I shudder every time I read Zechariah 12 and 14, where Jerusalem becomes a “heavy stone” (12:3) as it is attacked and “half the city goes into captivity” (14:2). People will be crying to the mountains to fall on them. Jesus, the rejected one, will rescue them when he comes.

Two criminals also were led away to be put to death. Maybe it is just Roman efficiency. If soldiers have to be out on duty, nine nails to drive are not much more than three. How sad! Of course the criminals’ argument comes into play later.

23:33-39 The Skull, Calvary, or Golgotha

Matthew 27:33, Mark 15:22, and John 19:17 refer to the Hebrew/Aramaic notion of Golgotha. It simply must have been a small hill just outside the city walls that would be a good showplace for executions, to deter crime and be viewed by a larger number. Decades ago, walking near the Damascus gate in Jerusalem, Rebekah and I saw a little hill above a bus station, and in its cliff what literally looked like a skull. There were two places for eyes and one for a mouth. No matter where it was, it was a showplace of Roman justice, or in regard to Jesus should we say a showplace for injustice?

“Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (v. 34). The words of Jesus are very strange in the context, and impossible “in the flesh”. As he lived a life full of the Holy Spirit, he did not act as our “human nature” normally acts or reacts. Can we forgive as he forgives?

The things that I marvel the most about in this scenario are the constant temptations away from the cross. Just as in the wilderness, where his three temptations were a diversion from ministry, the cross, and the Kingdom of God, here Jesus is tempted again, by the crowd, the leaders, the soldiers, even the thief on the cross. In Matthew 27:40 they are hurling abuse and crying out “save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross”.

The rulers say a similar thing “He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One” (Luke 23:35). Verse 36 says “the

soldiers also”. Common people, the chief priests, and the soldiers act in unison to tempt Jesus down from the cross for a “show” of his power. Like Bob Barker yelled on the game show *The Price is Right*, “Come on down!” But if he would have come down, we would still be in our sins.

Maybe the most interesting hurler of abuse is one of the criminals next to Jesus. “One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying ‘Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!’ ” (v. 39). If it were not such a dire situation, there may even be a little humor there, “Save yourself, and *us!*” Think about that, many offers to encourage Jesus to “come down!” Yet none of them related to the Father’s will of saving humanity and Jesus praying, “not my will but thine be done.”

23:40-49 The Criminal, the Centurion, and the Crowds

The one criminal rebuked the other! (v. 40) Like Pilate, this one says “but this man had done nothing wrong.” (v. 41) I wonder if the man had been with the crowds which heard Jesus share the gospel of the Kingdom. He has good eschatology! “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” (v. 42) *That* is good eschatology. It is very similar to Martha talking about her brother Lazarus, “Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day’ ” (John 11:24). However, in both situations, the King of the Kingdom is right there. Current traditionalists have translations that say: “Truly I tell you, today you will”. Please note how the comma affects the meaning. We “Adventists” might say “Truly I tell you today, you will be with me in Paradise.” Of course, in fairness to both sides, the early Greek had no punctuation at all.

With the earthquake, the darkness, and the calmness of Jesus in all of this (even taking care of his mother, as John’s account tells us), “the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent.’ ” (v. 47) And in Mark 15:39, saying “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

Verse 48 refers to “all the crowds who came together for this spectacle”, and it was quite a spectacle. It had yelling, screaming, hurling insults, desperate life-and-death situations, darkness, earthquakes – what a spectacle! But maybe the most meaningful picture in all of this is the blood running down after Jesus himself cries out “It is finished!” Hallelujah, *he hung in there!*

23:50-56 Joseph of Arimathea

Joseph of Arimathea (with Nicodemus, in John’s gospel) began to do the duties of burial and “continuing” to wait for the kingdom of God. Life, even with Jesus’ death, does go on. Recently Rebekah’s father, Jim Mattison,

died. We are still in the process of getting death certificates for various purposes: the state, the banks, the insurance companies, etc. It is interesting that Nicodemus brought a mixture of “myrrh and aloes” (John 19:39), which are fragrances for a King (Psa. 45:8). *The king is dead, long live the king through coming to life again!* Thank you Jesus for *not* coming down!

Life Response

How do we respond to such magnificence? How do we respond to such majesty? Jumping ahead a bit in Luke, Jesus said “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer” and he spoke of the need for the Christ to “suffer and rise again” But he concludes for us, “that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations” (24:26, 46).

Our response to Calvary, or Golgotha, is first from our knees thanking God who provided His Son for our salvation, and thanking Jesus even to the point that we repent and take advantage of the *great* sacrifice that he has made. “There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). *Then* our response is to *go* into all the world, beginning next door, with the gospel of the Kingdom.

Questions for Discussion

1. Would you carry his cross, being yoked together in sacrifice and service with Jesus?
2. What does that service mean in a *practical* way in your life? Time? Money? Other?
3. Do we weep too much for Jesus on the cross, and not get into all the world enough? After repentance, shouldn't we be going for him?
4. Do we face similar temptations to Jesus? Remember he was tempted in all ways as we are – do we have situations similar to his cross? Our adultery? Our stealing? Our greed? Our _____? Will we do what *we* want to do, versus what *God* wants us to do (and sometimes with people whispering in our ears – or screaming at us – “*forget God*”)?
5. What temptations could there be for *you* to get you off the cross of sacrifice and service (a better house, a bigger car, trying to be better than the neighbors)?
6. How do we go from sacrifice and service to hurling insults at those trying to serve?
7. Does the Kingdom/paradise pull us forward as it did with Jesus? “For the joy set before him, he endured the cross.” Is the joy of the Kingdom clear to us?

Message Bearers of Jesus' Resurrection

Golden Text: “[The women] returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.” (Luke 24:9)

Key Thought: Yahweh will more readily use you in Christian ministry if you show an abiding compliance to do His will.

Lesson Text: Luke 24:1-12 (NASB)

¹ But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; ⁵ and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, ⁷ saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” ⁸ And they remembered His words, ⁹ and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. ¹¹ But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.

¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.

Introduction

In a court of law witnesses are called to give various kinds of testimony. Eye witnesses to a crime provide chief testimony that can be very damning to a defendant's case. False witness can be equally damning though it often is told to condemn an innocent person, with various motives. Innocent people can be convicted. They have gone to jail and even been executed for crimes they did not commit based on false testimony and/or rigged evidence. This is very serious business to an honest court system. It is an abomination to Yahweh God as evidenced by His inclusion to forbid it in His law. The ninth of the Ten Commandments says: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exod. 20:16). Interestingly, in the law,

punishment for bearing false witness was to treat the false witness in the way he intended to cause harm to the innocent victim (Deut. 19:16-20).

Jewish women received very little respect as witnesses in the time of Jesus. The following attitude apparently was a common practice then.

The women did not have the right to be public witnesses in court cases. “Though the woman is subject to the commandments, she is disqualified from giving evidence” (Baba Kamma 88a). The Jewish historian, Josephus, records the attitude toward women of his time in Antiquities 4,219: “Let not the testimony of women be admitted because of the levity and boldness of their sex.” (“Women in the Old Testament and the Church, What place do women have in the church?”, www.letusreason.org/pent45.htm.)

Thus it is most interesting that the first people to hear of God’s report, through His angels, of the resurrection of Jesus, were Jewish women. It would take Jesus’ personal presence to make believers out of his male disciples.

Bible Learning

All the disciples are portrayed as law-abiding Jews as they kept the Sabbath following the death of Jesus. The women waited patiently until the Sabbath ended before taking up their chore of preparing the body of Jesus for final burial. “On the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.” Officially the Sabbath would have ended at sunset the day before, but self-respecting women would not be out in the streets conducting such tasks after dark. So as soon as daylight broke they made their way to the tomb.

Mark records that the women wondered how they would get the entrance stone moved. That is why they were surprised when “they found the stone rolled away from the tomb”. This was startling enough but “when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus”. With this revelation “they were perplexed” and their minds reeled with the possibilities of what might have become of the body of Jesus. This also caused duress and stress for they were not expecting this turn of events. Their adrenaline would rocket and fear and worry would overwhelm them. To whom should they turn? They were in an unsettling quandary as to what to do.

While they considered this “two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing”. The sight of these radiant angels sent by God to the tomb shocked them into silence. “The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground”; they were hoping no ill-treatment would come to them.

What happened next gradually changed their fear and worry into wonder, excitement, and joy. These “men said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living One among the dead?’” At first these words confused them. What did they mean? What were they trying to tell them? What were they talking about? “The living One?” “Among the dead?” And who were these men anyway? In their presence their fear and worry faded. These “men” were not threatening, their tone of voice was encouraging. Of whom were they speaking? Suddenly one of the men spoke again, saying, “He is not here, but He has risen.” Then, though his name had not been spoken, the women realized Jesus was the subject and great wonder started to rise within them. He has risen! Jesus is alive!

As an anticlimactic follow-up the message continued, “Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” The women’s suspicion had been confirmed. They were being told Jesus, who often referred to himself as the Son of Man, had risen from the dead. This clinched their belief. “And they remembered His words.” At an earlier time they did not want to believe what Jesus was telling them. Their concept of the Messiah involved a conquering hero. How could he be crucified? That may still have bothered them (for what could it all mean?) but at least now they understood. Jesus was alive again from the dead. They could not contain the great excitement and joy that filled them. They must run quickly to the disciples and tell them what they have just experienced and heard. So, they “returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest”. They knew what they had just witnessed, and they had to convey the facts.

Who were these women? “They were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles.” They were five or six (or more) women who frequently accompanied Jesus on his journeys. They listened and learned from Jesus along with the twelve and other disciples. They all had become a close-knit group. So the women ran back “telling these things to the apostles”. But culture interfered with the women’s ability to convince the male disciples of what they had witnessed. Their “words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them”. The apostles could not and would not believe the words of these women. They seemed like idle tales and lunatic stories. They did not know what they were talking about. They were delusional. This was consistent with the current cultural practice about the testimony of women. They could not be trusted.

Who knows for what reason, “but Peter got up and ran to the tomb”. Something within him triggered a need to check out the women’s story. He

got to the tomb and “stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only”. What the women told him about not finding the body of Jesus in the tomb was true, but their other words of witness, that he had risen from the dead, still did not register and all he could do was go “away to his home, marveling at what had happened”. Peter and the other disciples remained unbelievers (except perhaps for John, see John 20:8-9) until Jesus appeared to them personally. Then, and only then, were the testimonies of the women confirmed and believed.

Bible Application

It is an historical fact that Jewish women in the time of Jesus were not readily believed for their testimony regarding any matter. So why then did Yahweh allow women to be the first ones to hear the good news proclamation from the angels that Jesus had been raised from the dead? We know that God acts in mysterious ways. His ways are not our ways. We also know that once Jesus appeared alive before all the disciples their belief was never again shaken. So what is the lesson for us? Do not be judgmental of what others do in relation to good news preaching. God uses even those who are not so worthy in our eyes to deliver His message. Many have found salvation through less than desirable message bearers. Paul once said, “Some . . . are preaching Christ even from envy and strife . . . [they] proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives” (Phil. 1:15, 17). Still the message touched lives that honored God. Our task is to be faithful witnesses and to remain true to what we believe regardless what others may think of us. Male and female have equal rights to this good news and to provide service in it. And we should be bold to tell what we know and believe. We never know when the message may hit home in someone’s life.

Life Response

We must show a willingness to exercise our free will to be obedient to God’s call upon us to do what He expects us to do. God has shown great patience with those who have been reluctant to obey Him. Note Moses, Jonah, and Elijah. He continues to pursue those who eventually show a will to obey. But he does lose patience with those who constantly say *no* to His call. Eventually Yahweh will let us have our way even if it is to offer a persistent negative attitude. Yahweh is looking for compliant people to be His children. The resistant ones will find no accepting arms waiting for them at their resurrection. The women who came to bring spices to finalize the burial of Jesus were very compliant and obedient individuals. They did what was expected of them to do, what the angels called upon them to do, even

though the disciples did not accept their word. The women at the empty tomb lead the way for all to follow. They were the first to be obedient to proclaim the good news message as bearers of second-hand information. Their testimony was rejected, but they were faithful to their task. And eventually their message was believed. We too must be willing to be obedient to the tasks God calls upon us to do.

(Lesson 5, continued from page 26)

4. Do you deny Jesus and not even realize it? Would you rather play on your computer than pray to God? Would you rather have a fancy cell phone and play with it? Do you look at your cell phone more than your Bible?
5. Do we thank God daily for everything; the good and the bad? Do we really think we are going through more than Jesus did? Do we really think giving our only begotten son to die for the sins of the world was an easy thing to do? Or was the sacrifice of Jesus truly love personified?

The Road to Emmaus

Golden Text: “Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.” (Luke 24:35)

Key Thought: Jesus is alive and Jesus is with us. Often this remains hidden from us in our daily journeying. The act of the Church coming together in worship and breaking the bread reveals the Lord’s presence in our midst, and the act of the disciple stopping to give food to the hungry person that we meet helps us recognize Jesus.

Lesson Text: Luke 24:13-35 (NIV)

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

¹⁹ “What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

²⁵ He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly,

“Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Introduction

A middle-aged woman has a heart attack and is taken to the hospital. While on the operating table she has a near death experience. During that experience she sees God and asks if this is it. God says no and explains that she has another 30 years to live. Upon her recovery she decides to just stay in the hospital and have a face lift, liposuction, breast augmentation, tummy tuck, etc. She even has someone come in and change her hair color. She figures since she’s got another 30 years she might as well make the most of it. She walks out of the hospital after the last operation and is killed by an ambulance speeding by. She arrives in front of God and complains, “I thought you said I had another 30 years.” God replies, “I didn’t recognize you.” (<http://www.turnbacktogo.com/jokes-i-didnt-recognize-you/> accessed December 21, 2013)

While that joke might lack a lot in its theological precision it brings up an interesting point, the theology of recognition. Thomas Merton once observed about the false self: “To be unknown to God is entirely too much privacy” (*New Seeds of Contemplation*). Jesus himself cautioned the disciples about not being known by him: “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Matt. 7:22-23). What would be the consequences if God or Jesus didn’t recognize you? What if you didn’t recognize Jesus? He warned of that happening for many as well: “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?” (Matt. 25:44).

The consequences are the same for not being recognized by the Lord as for not recognizing the Lord; “they will go away to eternal punishment”, meaning the punishment of the ages, the lake of fire.

How can we be sure that we are recognized by the Lord and that we recognize the Lord in our midst? In today’s scripture we are taught that we recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. I believe this is fulfilled in two ways – by the worshipful act of the church coming together to break bread in communion, and in the church going out into the world and giving bread to the hungry. In both these instances we come to recognize Jesus.

Bible Learning

Today’s text tells the story of one of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances. It involved two of his disciples who were traveling the seven miles from Jerusalem back to their home in Emmaus. As they journeyed together on foot they were discussing all that had happened in Jerusalem in the preceding days. They were in mourning, for the one they believed might be their Messiah had been arrested, condemned, crucified and buried in the tomb. Their hopes for the arrival of the kingdom of God had been shattered. I imagine that to be one of the saddest, loneliest walks they ever took.

As they walked and talked, a stranger appeared and began walking with them. They didn’t know who this person was. Luke, as he tells the story, lets us in on the truth that the stranger is the risen Jesus. These two disciples don’t recognize Jesus and Luke says they “were kept from recognizing him”. One might speculate what kept them from recognizing Jesus. Had his appearance been altered? Was it simply because they thought he was dead and their minds refused to accept the idea that he was alive? Were they unable to see him clearly through their tears? Had God chosen to blind their eyes to Jesus for some reason? Luke doesn’t give an explanation. Perhaps he leaves that to the reader to wrestle with. Are there times when we don’t recognize Jesus?

As Jesus walked with them they began to tell him about what had been going on in Jerusalem. They gave a good description of Jesus: “a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people”. But more than that: “we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel”. This is how the early Jewish disciples understood Jesus – a powerful prophet before God who was going to redeem Israel. However they failed to understand that the one who was going to redeem Israel would accomplish that redemption by dying and rising again. Rumors of his resurrection had begun circulating earlier that day, but these disciples did not believe them to be true. Their telling of the tale ended with “some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see

Jesus”. They did *not* see Jesus; that’s how their story ended. Then Jesus gave, as Paul Harvey would have said, the *rest* of the story.

By the time they reached Emmaus Jesus had explained to them what the scriptures said about the Messiah dying and rising again. He gave them a comprehensive Bible study about the Messiah beginning with Genesis. I wonder if he started with Genesis 3:15

I will put enmity
 between you and the woman,
 and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
 and you will strike his heel.

What scripture would you have used to show that the Messiah had to suffer and die and rise again? Isaiah 53? Psalm 22?

They arrived at their destination, but they didn’t want the conversation to end. Being people of good hospitality, they invited their travelling companion to come in and join them for the evening. They still didn’t know that the stranger they met on the road was Jesus, but they offered him a place to sleep and food to eat. Was that because Jesus’ teachings taken root in their hearts? “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in” (Matt. 25:35).

At this point something truly remarkable happened. It would have normally been the place of the host to break the bread and pass it around to the guests, but Jesus reverses what was normal and expected. He took the bread and gave thanks for it and broke it and distributed it to them.

As they take the bread from Jesus something even more remarkable occurs, they recognize him. The word “recognize” comes from Latin: *re-* “again” + *cognoscere* “know”. To recognize is to know again. They again knew Jesus, whom they once knew but then did not know. They knew him again in the giving and receiving of bread.

Bible Application

Why did Luke include this story? What lessons are we to take away? I can see at least two. First, it served as a reminder to the church to continue to gather together on a regular basis and “break bread”. During the Passover meal just a few days prior to this Jesus had given special meaning to the act of coming together to break bread as an act of remembering him. It is easy to get so caught up in the business of the day – work to be done, places to go, people to see, activities that make us busy, busy busy – that we lose focus on who we are called to be: “the body of Christ on earth”. So Jesus

taught us to regularly gather together as a body, to break the bread in remembrance of him, and in doing that, we recognize that Jesus is still in our midst. When the Church gathers to worship and remember Jesus, he is there. Jesus even said “wherever two or three of you gather in my name I am there” (Matt. 18:20). Of course if he is there then obviously he knows us. To be in intimate connection to Jesus by gathering in his name offers us the assurance that he is with us and we are one of his.

Life is so hectic, often Church attendance feels like just one more activity in an already overcrowded schedule. Sometimes we convince ourselves it would be better to just stay home and get some things done. Or we feel like we just don’t get that much out of Church. *What good does it do me anyway?* Perhaps Luke wants to help us remember that when we gather in the name of Jesus we recognize that he is among us.

Church attendance continues to decline in much of the western world, even as it’s increasing in the third world. We need to remind ourselves, and those who have drifted away, that we need to gather regularly and that when we do we see Jesus. “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25).

The second takeaway I find in this story is an illustration of Jesus’ invitation to offer ministry to the stranger – food and water and shelter. Perhaps they were kept from recognizing Jesus so that his words to them could be illustrated in a powerful way. As they gave shelter and bread to this “stranger” they really were giving shelter and bread to Jesus. Jesus is present both when the Church gathers to worship in his name, and also when we go into the world offering loving and compassionate care to the stranger who is needy. Churches need to gather in worship, and churches need to scatter in ministry – and when we do both of these we manifest the presence of Jesus.

When they experienced the power of the risen Christ in this very real and personal way they were then motivated to go and witness to others about it. Evangelism becomes the natural overflow of being with the risen Christ. If you find yourself struggling to find the motivation to share your faith, perhaps you need to spend more time in the presence of the risen Christ through corporate worship and missional service to those in need. These are the places where you recognize Jesus in your midst, and which will motivate you to go and testify.

Life Response

How do you make manifest the presence of Jesus? You do it by coming together as the body of Christ and breaking bread in remembrance of him and you do it by going forth to serve bread and other forms of ministry to those in the world. In both instances, Luke shows us, we are making Jesus recognized or known again. We need worshipping churches and ministering churches, and you and I need to be both worshipping disciples and ministering disciples. That's how we know Jesus again. What are you doing to know and make known Jesus? Both worship and ministry need to be your priorities. When they become your priorities and you recognize Jesus, you will become his witness.

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think Thomas Merton meant by “to be unknown of God is altogether too much privacy”?
2. Talk about an experience you've had where you failed to recognize someone that you know, or when someone who should have recognized you did not. What does that feel like?
3. As a class brainstorm together what scriptures you would turn to in the Old Testament to show that the Messiah had to suffer and die.
4. The author introduces two takeaways from this story – the value of breaking bread together in worship and the value of sharing bread with the hungry – which help us to recognize Jesus. What makes it difficult for us to see Jesus in these things? What other lessons do you find in this story?
5. How will you intentionally make recognizing Jesus in the breaking of bread a central value in your discipleship?

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

Golden Text: “While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be to you.’” (Luke 24:36)

Key Thought: Yahweh brought peace and hope to a distressed world by raising His Son from the dead.

Lesson Text: Luke 24:36-53 (NASB)

³⁶ While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be to you.” ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. ³⁸ And He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰ And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. ⁴¹ While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; ⁴³ and He took it and ate it before them.

⁴⁴ Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

⁵⁰ And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple praising God.

Introduction

From time to time we hear stories of tragedy turning to triumph which amaze us. Faint murmurs of life come from crumbled walls following a tornado. A remarkable comeback is made by a sports team that was far behind in scoring during most of the game. A broken marriage’s long-time

mistrust and betrayal are overcome by the spouses' renewed commitment to one another. These improbable outcomes nonetheless occur as successful turnarounds. We like such stories because they give us hope that not all is necessarily lost. Hope gives us the chance to believe that triumph can still come from tragedy, that there is light at the end of a dark tunnel.

When Jesus died a criminal's death his disciples despaired of all hope. They were at a complete loss of what to make of the time they spent with him. They had come to believe that he was Yahweh's promised prophet in the likeness of Moses, the chosen One who would triumph and bring Israel victory over its enemies. Now all those dreams were gone. But Jesus had told them what would happen to him. They simply chose to overlook what he told them, and grief resulted.

Today's lesson changed everything in the lives of Jesus' disciples. It can also change everything in our lives if we choose to let it.

Bible Learning

Up until this moment in the book two of Jesus' disciples (Cleopas and his companion) were telling other disciples about a visit they had with a stranger they came to believe was Jesus. But the story did not convince them. A few days earlier they had witnessed Jesus' great suffering and cruel death on a Roman cross. They knew he was dead. His cold, limp body had been laid in a stone tomb. And until this morning it was still there.

Now they were hearing strange stories. Several women came from the tomb claiming to have seen Jesus alive (Matt. 28:8-10). And here before them were these two men who claimed the same remarkable tale (Luke 24:13-27). Such information was too overwhelming to take in, but just then, "while they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be to you.'" It was a totally unexpected visit. Jesus just appeared, though the doors were locked (John 20:19). Who was this intruder who now invaded their privacy? "They were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit." What else could they believe? How else could someone so suddenly, and unnoticed, appear in their midst? But Jesus sought to allay their fears. And He said to them, "'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet." This must have been an alarming and heart-pounding moment. Jesus never spoke his name but they knew who he was. Understandably they had a very hard time grasping what they were seeing. The tragedy of the past few days was confused with what their eyes

now beheld. What were they seeing here? Jesus' broken body was dead. Yet here stood one who appeared to be Jesus. How could this be?

He wanted them to know he was not a ghost. He offered his hands and feet for them to touch to convince themselves a real body stood in front of them, but they were so stunned they could only stare at him.

“While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them.” To arouse them out of their stupor Jesus asked for something to eat. A ghost could not hold or eat food. Surely this would have an impact on their imaginings. As Jesus enjoyed the morsel, the disciples slowly gathered round him, perhaps tentatively touching him, and allowed themselves to begin to believe that this person was indeed the Jesus they had come to know and love.

When once Jesus had won their confidence

He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their ¹minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Suddenly all these things Jesus had taught them in the past came flooding back to them. They realized that he had fulfilled every prophetic scripture that referred to him. Now they became eager searchers of truth, the whole truth, and Jesus did not disappoint them. He revealed to them anew the whole meaning of his purpose in coming into the world by his Father's design. Now the gospel he had been proclaiming from city to city became exceedingly clear and great joy filled their hearts.

Once Jesus was satisfied that his disciples had begun to grasp the full meaning of his teachings, he then charged them saying, “You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Then he disappeared from their sight as suddenly and dramatically as he had come. A new task was laid upon them. They were charged with proclaiming all that they had seen and been taught. They were his witnesses. And they would go out in the power of God with great boldness and with attesting miracles, knowing that what they proclaimed was not only very good news but absolute truth.

Forty days later Jesus “led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from

them and was carried up into heaven.” This was the last time most of his disciples saw Jesus. A few were privileged to hear his voice of instruction again or to see visions of him. But his presence never left any of them. They were a changed people. They had faced and endured tragedy. Now they were enjoying the wondrous benefits of triumph. “And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.”

Bible Application

Jesus has shown that his life and message can bring triumph out of tragedy. We all have a measure of tragedy, or at least trials, in our lives. But Yahweh God has given us reason for hope that triumph can always come to those who trust in what God offers through His Son. The words of Jesus that “the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name” are more poignant when we understand the context in which they sprang to explicit meaning in the life and ministry of Jesus and his disciples.

When we know for sure that our mortal life is not the end of life, it gives us a whole new perspective. For one thing, it tells us that we will live again. Situations can make us pretty miserable, and discouraged. Much can be lost of our dreams. But hope of a better life can turn that misery and discouragement around into joy and peace. We may not win the lottery, or marry a rich mate, or be healed of a serious ailment, but we can still have hope. Jesus has given us the evidence that this is so. In his teachings, he has shown us how to live a more hope-filled life now and overcome our brokenness. That brokenness cannot always be changed, but it can be endured and triumphed over. That is the message of Jesus’ resurrection and life. And he offers it to us for our hope.

Life Response

All of us have faced, are facing, or know someone who is facing a great life trial. Hope is what is needed to find the strength required to overcome those trials. People will die mentally, spiritually and eventually physically for lack of hope. We have a good news message that can reassure the hopeless that their lives can still have meaning. Not all, in fact not many, will even listen to this message. Rather some will deny its power to bring them hope. But there is great value in helping the downtrodden to understand the great gift Yahweh has accomplished on their behalf.

(continued on page 56)

The Widow's Might

Golden Text: “A pretense of superiority lowers a person’s reputation, but genuine humility raises it.” (Proverbs 29:23, paraphrased)

Lesson Aim: (1) To understand that God honors those who honor *Him*, and distrusts those who honor self, (2) To know that the most profound faith often presents itself in the most humble of forms.

Lessons Text: Luke 20:45–21:4 (NIV)

⁴⁵ While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples,
⁴⁶ “Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.
⁴⁷ They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”

^{21:1} As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ² He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins.
³ “Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴ All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

Life Need

I was in an aisle of the grocery when I heard a lady’s voice, “Well, how is your day going?” I was reaching for a box of cereal on the top shelf, so I glanced over my shoulder and replied, “Great! How are you this morning?” It always brings a good feeling when a stranger offers a friendly greeting. “What do you think of this odd weather?” she asked. I replied, “Well, I’m not very fond of snow.” Then I heard her say, “I’m sorry, what did you say? There’s some nut standing here who won’t shut up.” I turned and saw that she was on a smart phone, talking to some unknown entity at some distant location. I set the box of oat bran back on the shelf and scurried off to buy some less healthy, but more comforting, donuts. Embarrassment makes one act irrationally.

YOU TRUTH: (1) *What’s your favorite way to communicate with others? Phone? Text? E-mail? Body language (smile, hug, frown, raised fist)? Why do you especially like that favorite form of communication?* (2) *Have you ever played the nut in a situation similar to the one above? Explain. How did you feel afterward?*

How do we communicate to the world that we are God’s children? That question lies at the heart of today’s lesson. What is the reach of superficial religion in attempting to show God’s love to the world, contrasted with the reach of a widow’s arm stretched out to drop a penny into an “offering plate”? In other words, what does it mean to give God our best?

YOU TRUTH: (1) *Share: What’s the most humble Life Testimony you’ve ever witnessed? What about it touched you so much that you still remember it? (2) Why are “Word in action” testimonies as important in reaching the world as verbal ones? (Romans 2:12-16; James 1:22; 2:20-24)*

Lesson Background and Discussion

Some modern versions of the Bible have the widow in our story donating two *pennies*, a term well-known to us. The men who crafted the King James Version did the same in their translating, using a word well-known to them, *mite*, to describe the widow’s coins. The mite was a common coin in KJV times. Jesus was referring to *lepta* (singular, *lepton*), the smallest of all Roman coins. These copper coins circulated in Palestine during the time of Jesus, and those who contributed them would have been identified as financially destitute.

YOU TRUTH: (1) *Show of hands: How many of you have a “penny jar”? If you took the exact same jar and filled it with silver dollars, which of the jars would contain the greater riches? Is it possible for the person who holds the jar of silver dollars to be just as humble as the widow? Explain. (2) In general, why do you suppose “poor people” are looked down on in this world?*

Though some might use this story to teach tithing and offering, the deeper meaning is found in the contrast between the vain, entitled, religious leaders and one who joyfully lived her faith in an expression of humble, heartening affection for God. To give all is not to give *some*; it’s to offer *everything* we are to the Perfect Love that is higher than ourselves.

Our lesson shows how the simple reaching out of a tired, worn woman’s arm can shake the foundations of the religious world, communicating in one ordinary act of faith just how much power and grace “humble” can hold.

THE SHOW (20:45-46) Some people crave attention because they’re lonely and feel inferior in this world. Others demand to be noticed because they figure they deserve it, being so wonderful and all. Whether out of emotional uncertainty or plain old arrogance, the teachers of the law loved to be *seen*. They enjoyed showing off and being honored in all the lofty social circles. After all, weren’t they the ones chosen to share God’s will with the masses? Aren’t leaders supposed to be noticed? But who in today’s

lesson is the real teacher? The lawyer? The widow? Who most deserves the attention and the accolades?

YOU TRUTH: *What's the difference between being "presentable" and being ostentatious? Can church buildings be "gaudy"? How about clothing or motor vehicles? What about Bibles? Does appearance even matter at all?*

THE BLOW (20:47) What does it mean to "devour widows' houses?" According to Strong's *Concordance*, the Greek word can mean "to forcibly appropriate" possessions. In other words, one way these men accumulated enough wealth to buy their fancy robes was to "steal" from the poor (Amos 2:6-8). Then they had the nerve to stand up in public and pray long prayers asking God Almighty to make them more pious.

YOU TRUTH: *Do long prayers inspire you or make you yawn? What would be a good prayer for a showy religious leader to pray if he/she were like the teachers in this story? What elements would such a prayer include?*

THE GLOW (21:1-4) We're talking here about proportions. In total amount given the rich greatly surpassed the poor widow, yet in percentage of income the woman outshone them all. They had large purses; she had a larger heart. Her communication of God's glory causes us to shield our eyes, while the teachers' efforts barely make us blink (Prov. 13:7). I was recently shown a couple of photos of fish caught and those who caught them. One fully-grown man had caught a salmon that was fully a third of the man's height in length. The other picture was of a young girl who had caught a fish about half her height in length. Even though the man's fish was obviously larger, in proportion to the little girl's height, her fish was bigger. Proportion. Most of a little is more than a little of much.

YOU TRUTH: *What impresses you the most about the widow? The story here is about money, but what other things can we share "til it hurts?" In other words, how does this truth apply to other areas of our lives?*

Bible Application

I'm writing this lesson during the Advent season. After worship one Sunday morning several of us had congregated in the church entryway. I have a bad habit of playing with my necktie ("suit noose", I call it). Anyway, on that particular morning I accidentally squeezed the end of my suit noose and it began playing a tune: *Jingle Bells*. Funny thing was, just as soon as the music began, nearly everyone in the entryway pulled out their smart phones. "Is that my phone?" "I don't think it's mine" "Is that your ring tone?" I didn't even tell them it was my necktie. I was enjoying this techno-chaos too much. (I'm still grinning.)

We live in a strange and wonderful world wherein we juggle our use of the latest technology with our individual desires for a sense of

accomplishment and purpose. Experts tell us that there's a danger of our becoming little more than silly, grinning button pushers, letting the technology work, think, and wonder for us. Most humans, however, know how to use machines to work for us without actually becoming us.

Something similar can happen in the communication of our faith. We can become as shallow as a stream at the end of a summer drought, trickling and trifling, or we can become a waterfall revelation of God's love. If, as James said, faith without works is dead, then we must do all we can to keep our faith alive and vital by keeping it active and simple – and humble.

(Lesson 10, continued from page 52)

Many hurting people can identify with the passion Jesus faced and the sorrow endured by his disciples who watched his sufferings. The news of Jesus' resurrection is good news to the despondent – like the sorrowing disciples or the hopeless of this world. We as a believing people need to continually seek ways to bring this good news to a hurting world.

The Future of Jerusalem?

Lesson Text: Luke 21:5-24 (NRSV)

⁵ When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ⁶“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

⁷ They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” ⁸ And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them.

⁹ “When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.”

¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹ there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

¹² “But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³ This will give you an opportunity to testify. ¹⁴ So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; ¹⁵ for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all because of my name. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your souls.

²⁰ “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; ²² for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfillment of all that is written. ²³ Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people; ²⁴ they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Introduction

Would you like to have been face-to-face with Jesus like the Twelve were? Wouldn't it be great to be able to ask him anything? In our lesson today, his disciples ask Jesus a question that I think we'd all like to ask: When is this world going to end and the new world come?

Our text today is very familiar to students of prophecy although we might be more familiar with Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse, a talk that Jesus gave to his disciples during the week before his death and resurrection. It received its name because Jesus was on the Mount of Olives when his disciples asked him questions about his earlier statement that the Temple would one day be destroyed.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record this discourse, Matthew in chapter 24 and Mark in chapter 13. One thing that we have to do in order to understand the message from Luke is to compare the differences between what Luke records and what is written in Matthew and Mark.

(I've developed a parallel of the account in Matthew, Mark and Luke, color coded to note common and unique material. It can be downloaded at <https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B11mKBB5G4ZBc2FQTGowR0hSdDA&usp=sharing>)

There are differences among the various gospel accounts of many events from the life of Jesus. It is probable that some of these are due to Jesus telling the same stories in many settings and perhaps in differing circumstances simply because the only way people knew what Jesus said was by hearing him live. So, for example, it is very possible that Jesus told the parable of talents both while in Zaccheus' house and later after the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 25). It would fit both contexts.

But today's text would be different. The setting is a specific time and situation described very distinctly in the three gospel accounts. Yet there are differences in wording throughout the three accounts. Why is that?

In modern life it is common to hear various accounts of a specific incident. We might read about it from a newspaper or a news magazine, or a blog on the internet, or watch it reported on the local news or by a national news outlet. Among the different versions of the same event some accounts may even seem contradictory. Even reports which let us hear words spoken at an event might be edited in ways that give different impressions of what happened.

Is the difference between the various gospel accounts like the difference between Fox News, *The New York Times* and TMZ? Is it simply a matter of a point of view?

Our view of the inspiration of scripture might cause us to chafe at such a suggestion. For some, inspiration means that we should have the exact

words Jesus spoke, in their exact order and with the same context. If we hold such a view, the differences between the gospel accounts must only be apparent and not real. We must harmonize the accounts, i.e., explain them in a way that maintains the accuracy of each account.

Yet the Bible doesn't actually claim that inspiration means we have a transcription of what happened. Luke says, in his first chapter, that he was aware of what others had written and that he had received accounts from those who were eyewitnesses. The differences in the gospel accounts indicate to this author that God allowed the writers to use their own thinking when they wrote. That might include using their own discretion in recreating the dialogue.

I'm not writing this to simply consider the doctrine of inspiration but rather because I think our understanding of this discourse can be enhanced by appreciating the differences among the various accounts. We'll write more about that later.

Bible Learning

5-6. This statement of Jesus provoked the disciples' question that led to the Olivet Discourse. While they adored the Temple, Jesus said that the day would come when not one stone would be left upon another.

Luke adds a phrase not found in the other gospels: "the days will come." Jesus uses that or a similar phrase five times in Luke (5:35; 17:22; 19:43; 23:29) and it is reminiscent of Old Testament prophets. Jeremiah uses the phrase, "behold days are coming," 17 times. That includes the place in chapter seven (verse 32) where God warns about pending judgment upon Solomon's Temple (John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*. WBC 35C; Accordance/Thomas Nelson electronic ed. Dallas: Word Books, 1993).

If Luke was written after A.D. 70, which seems to be the predominant view of scholars, then hearing echoes of Jeremiah might cause Luke's readers to make a connection between the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the recent destruction of Herod's Temple. According to Josephus, both Temples were destroyed on the exact same day of the year.

7. Luke gives the shortest account of the question and it includes a subtle difference. Here are the questions as recorded in the various gospels:

Matthew: "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

Mark: "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?"

Luke: "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?"

Matthew definitely refers to a sign concerning the second coming, Mark about when *all* these things will take place, while Luke only asks for a sign about the destruction of the Temple. We will consider that distinction later in this lesson.

8-11. Jesus begins by warning against false messiahs and noting distressful events that will happen as this age continued. The one thing different from Matthew and Mark is the statement, “but the end will not follow immediately.” Earlier in Luke he says that Jesus told the parable of the talents to counter the expectation that the kingdom would come immediately (Luke 19:11). It is important for Luke that his readers not get caught up in end-times speculation.

12-19. Most of this section is the same as Mark but Luke omits one phrase that Matthew and Mark use and substitutes another. Matthew includes the phrase that many “will fall away.” Both he and Mark speak of believers enduring to the end while Luke simply promises eternal life even if the believer is killed. Matthew and Mark make us think of events in the end times but we could read Luke as a description of what the church experienced in the book of Acts. Some believers were put to death; they were taken before synagogues, kings and governors. Peter and John demonstrated Jesus’ promise to give them the words to speak when they impressively testified before the Sanhedrin.

20-24. This section begins and ends with statements unique to Luke:

“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near;” and “they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

What comes in between is almost identical with Matthew and Mark, except the instruction to pray that those days don’t happen in the winter. But Luke leaves out the direct reference to Daniel’s prophecy of the 70 weeks, present in both Matthew and Mark, and presents the subject as the city rather than the Temple.

Recall our earlier mention of Luke not stating the request for a sign in the same way as Matthew and Mark did. Luke’s Gospel doesn’t mention a request for a sign of the end of the age but rather for a sign about the destruction of the Temple. It appears that he now gives that sign in the warning about “when they see Jerusalem surrounded by armies.”

What is happening here? Consider two things. First that Matthew, and probably Mark, had a predominantly Jewish audience. They would already be familiar with prophetic materials from the Old Testament and especially with the way that Jesus had already fulfilled some prophecies in his earthly ministry while others were still to be fulfilled. Luke wrote to a

predominantly Gentile audience that might not be as familiar with the nature of apocalyptic and prophetic writings.

The second thing is the likelihood that Jerusalem had already been taken and the Temple destroyed by the time Luke wrote his gospel. His audience could be wondering what that meant in light of Jesus' prophetic statements on the Mount of Olives.

Luke solves that by including the destruction of Jerusalem in his account but then clearly showing that this is not the end of matters by introducing his second unique statement that the times of the Gentiles had now come and would go on until God determined that they should end. He then jumps forward to material that will be covered in next week's lesson.

Bible Application

Prophecy students have long argued about whether the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 or if it is yet future. One school, the Preterist, says that it was completely fulfilled, including the coming of Christ in some sense. The historicist position tends to say that Daniel's 70th week was fulfilled in A.D. 70 but that the second coming is yet future. Most futurists acknowledge some fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in the book of Acts but insist that the prophecy concerning the Temple and Jerusalem is all still to be fulfilled.

This author is suggesting a modified futurist view. Everything up through verse 20 began to happen almost immediately in the church age and continues through this day in various forms. (For example, I don't believe Christians will ever have to worry about persecution from synagogues again. But totalitarian governments and other religions have certainly opposed Christianity, sometimes very violently. Until the last century more Christians were killed by others professing to be Christians than by any other entities.)

Luke handles the prophecy of the destruction of the Temple by describing the events of A.D. 70 but doesn't say that it was a fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. So we can read Matthew and Mark as being *either* futurist or historical, but we can see *both* a historic and future fulfillment in Luke.

As the *Introduction* mentioned, some aren't comfortable with a doctrine of inspiration that allows this much freedom for biblical writers. This author thinks that we should consider Luke as inspired but that we shouldn't force him to write the same things as Matthew and Mark. Can we not believe that God led Luke to write as he did?

Life Response

One advantage of seeing A.D. 70 as being on Jesus' mind is that we can see that his prophecy was fulfilled. We look to the future for so many things to happen. Isn't it good to see prophecy fulfilled in this age?

Evident throughout this passage is Jesus' concern for his people, both for all the Jewish people who would be impacted by the destruction of Jerusalem as well as for his disciples, who were going to face persecution for believing in him. He gives us assurance that there is nothing from outside us that can take our eternal life. He assures us that he will be with us in times of trouble, even giving us the words to speak.

Questions for Discussion

1. When you have noticed differences in the ways that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John recorded events in the life of Jesus were you comfortable with the differences? How have you heard these differences explained?
2. What do you think of the idea that the gospel writers had editorial freedom in recreating the words of Jesus?
3. How are Jeremiah's prophecies about the destruction of the Temple similar to Luke 21?
4. What are the differences in the disciples' questions as recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke?
5. Why would Luke want his readers to know that the end was not near?
6. Give examples of how verses 12-19 were fulfilled in the book of Acts.
7. How does Luke's account of the destruction of Jerusalem differ from Matthew's and Mark's? How are they similar?
8. What does "the times of the Gentiles" mean?
9. What do you think of the idea that the Olivet Discourse includes the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 while this also allows for a future fulfillment at the end of this age?
10. What difference can this prophecy make in your life this week?

Watch!

Key Verse: “But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:36)

Lesson Aim: To consider Jesus’ return, and the importance of our spiritual preparation and alertness to world happenings should it be in our lifetimes.

Life Need

Jesus’ words always carry extra weight for God’s people. It is not that the entirety of the Bible isn’t authoritative, but what the Son of God has left us needs our most careful examination. Our text from Luke 21 generally parallels Matthew 24 and Mark 13. All three texts tell inspired words left us when Jesus’ disciples asked about the signs of His coming (or return).

That topic was central to the founding of our Church of God. In the middle 1800s we began to emerge from the aftermath of William Miller’s efforts, known as the Millerite Movement. Miller’s work ended with what is called the Great Disappointment – so termed from the result when Jesus did not return as many anticipated on October 22, 1845.

Thousands left the movement as individuals, but some groups also emerged from its remains. One centered around Joseph Marsh. They had to admit to being mistaken about the date for Jesus’ return, but they continued to insist on the truth of His literal return to this planet to establish God’s Kingdom.

We, today, maintain that truth as central to our understanding of eschatology, though we have avoided the mistake of date-setting which proved disastrous to those in the Millerite Movement, including Joseph Marsh.

There are still those today attempting to ascertain the date of Christ’s return. Harold Camping, who died recently, had set at least two dates for that event (both have passed without His appearance). The fact that these attempts continue is fascinating, as Jesus indicated even He didn’t know when it would be (Matt. 24:36). Only the Father knew!

This issue takes on more complexity when considering the “Great Tribulation,” and the question of whether or not “God’s people” (a term that lends itself to considerable discussion) would experience it. For some years it seemed that the prevailing opinion was that the Church would not go through the Great Tribulation. This belief, known as the “Pre-Tribulation

Rapture” theory, seems to be in less favor now. More acceptance has gone to believing that the Church will go through the Great Tribulation, the “Post-Tribulation Rapture” theory.

Both theories expect Jesus’ literal return to catch His people away (1 Thess. 4:13-18). A second aspect of the question is whether this Great Tribulation comes upon the Jews or the Church. It is difficult to demonstrate from this passage. It is understandable that this portion of Scripture generates much discussion and consideration.

Lesson Text: Luke 21:25-38 (NASB)

²⁵ “There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory. ²⁸ But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹ Then He told them a parable: “Behold the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they put forth *leaves*, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. ³¹ So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

³⁴ “Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; ³⁵ for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. ³⁶ But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

³⁷ Now during the day He was teaching in the temple, but at evening He would go out and spend the night on the mount that is called Olivet. ³⁸ And all the people would get up early in the morning *to come* to Him in the temple to listen to Him.

Bible Learning

Our text seems to naturally divide into four parts, each with points for us to consider. These will be addressed briefly here, reserving more extensive discussion for the *Bible Application*.

Part 1 – verses 25-28

a. Signs in the sun, moon and stars: are these signs literally about astronomical happenings, or not? You may want to consider the blood moons that are in the near future (between April 2014 and September 2015).

b. On the earth, dismay among the nations: we could see this as true now, but what is intended and does it require spiritualized “signs”?

c. The sea and the waves roaring: this has usually been applied to the peoples of the world as “seas”, though recent tsunamis have caused great devastation.

d. Men’s hearts fainting from expectation over what is coming: again we must wonder if this involves a response to seeing signs in the sky, or events on the world’s political stage.

e. The powers of heaven will be shaken: is this what was described in Ephesians 6:11-12?

f. Then you will see the Son of Man (Jesus) coming in the clouds: this does not seem like a secret rapture of the Church, but what is pictured in Revelation 19:11-15. But does it occur after the “marriage supper of the Lamb” (see Rev. 19:7-9)?

g. When these first five things are observed, God’s people are to be on alert.

Part 2 – verses 29-33

a. Parable of the “fig tree and all the trees”: often applied to the nation of Israel emerging on the world stage in 1948, but while the fig tree has been used as representative of Israel, here “all” the trees are included with the fig tree.

b. Appearance of leaves indicates summer is coming soon: perhaps rather than symbolic of Israel this just involves the natural phenomena about spring, but again Jesus specifically mentions the “fig” tree.

c. The signs from earlier verses indicate the Kingdom of God is near: unlike when Jesus said that His very presence indicated the Kingdom was in some sense already present (Luke 11:20), this refers to an eschatological event.

d. Jesus promises that “this generation” will not end before all these come to pass: the question is what “this generation” means. It is obviously not those who heard His words then. The “leaving out of the fig tree” provides some with the view that “this generation” is the one which witnessed Israel’s nationhood beginning, now over 65 years ago.

Part 3 – verses 34-36

a. Guard your hearts against drunkenness and dissipation: drunkenness does not seem like a danger for people trying to serve the Lord, but “turning to drink” is often associated with fear and stress. Dissipation is usually used of sexual immorality. Hannah More wrote: “Luxury and dissipation, soft and gentle as their approaches are, and silently as they throw their silken chains about the heart, enslave it more than the most active and turbulent vices.”

b. Suddenly like a trap: this involves how the day will be for those who are not aware and watching.

c. Prayer for strength to escape these things: on the side of a pre-tribulation rapture some point to this escape as similar to the opportunity of Noah and those in the ark.

d. And stand before the Son of Man: this is always the end (cp. Rom. 14:10)

Part 4 – verses 37-38

a. Teaching in the Temple during the day: Jesus was drawing supportive crowds to Him, but the national religious leaders saw Him as a threat to their positions.

b. Seemingly Jesus was alone at night on the Mount of Olives. Jesus knew what was ahead for Him. He knew the crowds would melt away before the authorities came for Him.

c. The crowds came back in the morning to hear Him again, as if they couldn't stay away.

Bible Application

Part 1 – verses 25-28

a. How do these verses interact with Acts 2:20 and Revelation 6:12? Are they all about the same time / event? Is the darkening of the sun about the orb of the sun itself darkening, or about the light of the sun being masked from the earth (perhaps by clouds, smoke, or volcanic ash)?

b. Is there dismay on the earth because of people not knowing or understanding what the Bible indicates must come to pass? Ought we to make more effort for letting God's prophetic plan be known (especially to those we care deeply about)? Can we do that widely and in a way that confronts, but without giving offense? (Consider 1 Peter 3:15-16.)

c. With tsunamis now becoming familiar to us, ought we also to consider Matthew 24:7 and earthquakes? We may be concerned with a literal shaking of the earth (compare Matthew 24:29 and Mark 13:25).

d. Is it unreasonable to be fearful of where our world seems headed? Should we, as God’s people, fear what is to come, or can we avoid that through our confidence in Him? Will He protect us as times get more and more dangerous for Christians? Consider those now living in Islamic lands.

e. Is it reasonable, in light of what you know, for you to expect to see the Return of Christ? People down through the centuries have thought it might happen in their lifetimes. Would we be on the alert, and watching, if we didn’t think it could happen in our lifetimes?

Part 2 – verses 29-33

a. When Jesus specifically names the fig trees and then all the trees was he showing us the significance of Israel as still precious to God? Some now equate the Church with Israel. Does that diminish the importance of national Israel? Is there still a place in God’s heart for Israel? Should our country be more supportive of and protective of Israel among the nations?

b. How long is a biblical generation? Since Israel was reestablished prophecy students have posited different times. Some said 20 years, or 40 years. Some have said a hundred years. Is the present 65+ years too long for us to continue to “wait and watch”?

Part 3 – verses 34-36

a. Why does Jesus warn us of the danger of moral failures? Aren’t we saved by grace? Is there increased danger for even Christians to slip back into sin?

b. Jesus warns us to not let “that day” come upon us a trap, but to be alert for it. How can we get our company of Christians to be more watchful? How can we best be alert to prophetic signs? What can we do as time goes along and we become slumbering (like the unwise virgins of Matthew 25:1-12)?

Part 4 – verses 37-38

a. The lack of attentiveness toward the preaching of the Gospel seems strange. Is it due to the topic or to the presenters? People seem far more passive now toward the message of the Gospel, almost like they already know it and don’t need to think too much about it anymore.

b. Do you think the Church needs more time apart and alone with God? Apparently Jesus needed that, but was it only because He knew what was ahead for Him? Might we consider what is in the Church’s future? Is the lack of respect for Christianity in our culture a sign of things already being underway?

Life Response

1. Are we seeing signs that point to Jesus' return being imminent?
2. If we do see that, does it provoke us to be more evangelistic?
3. If we really believe Jesus might soon return, immediately or in the near years, how ought that to change our focus and efforts?
4. How vital is it to respond to Jesus' call to "watch," and what might it mean for you?